

# 150 YEARS OF MERIDEN





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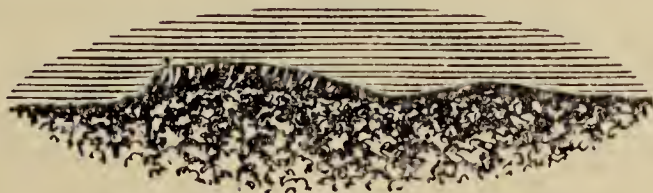






# 150 YEARS OF MERIDEN

PUBLISHED IN CONNECTION WITH  
THE OBSERVANCE  
OF THE CITY'S SESQUICENTENNIAL  
JUNE 17-23, 1956



*MERIDEN, CONNECTICUT: 1956*

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# Foreword

A CITY has many aspects, and these aspects change with advancing years.

But one aspect of Meriden is as immutable as the forces of nature which brought it into being: its location in the pleasant valley rimmed by the unique formations of up-ended stone which are its heritage from the glacial age. These hills, with their wooded slopes, are the blessing and inspiration of today's generation as they were to the first inhabitants who set their homes and houses of worship upon the high land in the eastern section to overlook a morass which they were still unfitted to conquer.

Eventually the swamp was covered and made firm. The city spread westward, wiping out all traces of the ancient wilderness. For more than half of the nineteenth century Meriden was a village, until, after 1867, it took shape as a municipality. By 1906 it had assumed much of the form we know today.

Meriden is fortunate in many respects, not the least of which is its ability to retain some of the village's advantages while growing to its present population of 48,000. One of these advantages is the closely knit community spirit which binds and has always bound it together. It is this spirit which earned for the city, during World War II, the national title, officially bestowed by the U. S. Government, of the "Ideal War Community." And it is this spirit which promises well for future achievements as we look now, with pride, at the best which has gone before.

The hundred years from 1806 to 1906, and the earlier era when Meriden was a part of Wallingford, have been recorded in previously published histories. But no book has been printed, until now, to cover the last 50 years. This volume, authorized by the General Committee for the Sesquicentennial, is the first effort to bring the story up to date. Its compilation and writing were entrusted to a committee of four, which has labored for months to sift past and present sources of information and produce a work as complete as possible within the limits of allotted space.

The committee owes much to previous historians, and to

numerous individuals of the present who have helped it to gather material. Thankfully, it acknowledges the services rendered by the following:

Robert W. Seekamp, Russell H. White, Florence Minkwitz, F. Harold Grimes, Eleanor Dossin, Glover A. Snow, John F. Molloy, Barbara White, Cyrus Baird, Arthur Service, Arthur Barber, and members of the staffs of the Meriden Record and the Meriden Journal for assistance along the way. Technical advice on questions of publication and illustration was given by Spencer H. Miller of Miller-Johnson, Inc. and by Harold Hugo of the Meriden Gravure Company.

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and Meriden Journal





# Song of Meriden

## I

*In the heart of old Connecticut  
A few miles from the sea,  
There stands our city, Meriden,  
Ideal Community;  
Thus honored as our country's choice  
To share the pride we feel,  
That in the whole United States  
Our city is ideal.*

## II

*One hundred fifty years ago,  
A small town was begun;  
Surrounded by protective hills  
And smiled on by the sun.  
The early settlers planted deep  
Their roots within this earth;  
And now, in nineteen fifty-six,  
We celebrate its birth.*

## III

*The busy hum of industry  
Is heard from day to day;  
Our silvercraft and sparkling jewels  
Are all on world display.  
Although we're modern, up-to-date,  
We are old-fashioned, too;  
We love our concerts in the park,  
Sweet summer's rendezvous.*

## IV

*Our City Hall commands a hill  
In strong democracy,  
From where a glance may rest upon  
A mountain or a tree;  
The Christian Church and Synagogue  
Stand closely side by side,  
In friendly peace as God would wish  
All people to abide.*

## V

*To God we pray upon this day  
That faith in Him increase,  
To build for children after us  
An everlasting peace;  
That through all time we'll keep the name  
We are so prideful of,  
The Silver City of the world,  
The place of home and love.*

— LYDIA B. ATKINSON

## CHAPTER ONE

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# Colonization

ONE HUNDRED and fifty years ago Meriden attained its identity as a separate community. It was in 1806 that the General Assembly in Hartford granted a petition from the residents of the northern part of the town of Wallingford asking recognition as an incorporated town on equal footing with its parent, Wallingford. The first town meeting of Meriden was held in June, 1806.

The history of Meriden, however, goes much further back. It must include not only the Wallingford background from which it stemmed. An understanding of the character of the people who founded Meriden depends upon knowing something of the causes of the migration which turned an erstwhile wilderness into cultivated farmlands. Meriden's history does not go back to the very beginnings of New England. Yet her character is shaped by the Puritan exodus from Europe as surely as is the character of Massachusetts where the colonists first took root.

Those first settlers in Massachusetts were rugged individualists. Mayflower passengers were followed by a continuing flow of immigration caused by religious strife in England. In 1630 a thousand Puritan men found their way across the Atlantic with John Winthrop at their head, and the Massachusetts settlements were firmly established. These men were less in search of political liberty than of freedom to live by the Bible as they interpreted it. The Bible was to them a code of law. Anyone who would not accept their interpretation had no place in their community.

Soon the seeds of discontent were sown. Massachusetts was fertile ground for them. A provision of the colonial government ordained that none but church members should vote or hold office. Dissenters began to speak out against this narrowed assumption of power. Not all the clergy approved of so much temporal power in the hands of churchmen. One of the most eloquent dissenters was Thomas Hooker, a pastor in New Town, now Cambridge. He said that "in matters which concern the common good, the general council, chosen by all, to transact businesses which concern all, I conceive most suitable to rule and



most safe for relief of the whole." This was in answer to Winthrop who had said: "The best part is always the least, and of the best part the wiser part is always the lesser."

As the historian John Fiske writes, "It is interesting to meet, on the very threshold of American history, with such a lucid statement of the strongly contrasted views which a hundred and fifty years later were to be represented on a national scale by Hamilton and Jefferson." It was Thomas Hooker who led a hundred or more of his parishioners in 1636 to make a settlement in the Connecticut valley, and to bring with them what we now call the "Jeffersonian philosophy" of democratic government.

Thomas Hooker's followers made the Hartford settlement and the separate existence of Connecticut began. The Hooker philosophy was contained in his powerful sermon at the opening of the General Court in 1638 when he said "the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people."

In the spring of that same year, 1638, New Haven was founded under the leadership of another pastor, John Davenport. He had been "converted" by Hooker and others when, back in England, he had tried to dissuade them from their plan to emigrate to the New World. Accordingly he recruited a group of merchants from Yorkshire, Kent, and Hertfordshire to come with him. Their arrival in Boston coincided with some of the bitterest disputes between the tolerant and the intolerant. Davenport found Boston uncomfortable. His flock wanted a good harbor and a site with a commercial future. They also wanted a place where they could match their civil management to their own particular interpretation of Scriptural guidance.

Davenport and his followers heard about a place called Quinnipiack on Long Island Sound. Men who had been on a campaign against the Pequot Indians reported in glowing terms on the possibility of this location. So the Davenport party began their project which rapidly grew to spill over eventually into Wallingford and what is now Meriden. Also fresh arrivals from England settled Guilford, and a New Haven overflow settled Milford. When Stamford was added in 1640 the four towns united in a republic of New Haven similar to the confederation of towns around Hartford that constituted Connecticut.

There the similarity ended. Connecticut followed Hooker's ideas that the choice of public officials "belongs to the people



by God's own allowance." In New Haven "pillars of the church" governed and were judge-and-jury all in one. The New Haven colony was less democratic than Massachusetts from which Hookerites had fled. The first settlers of New Haven were the wealthiest of any that came to any part of early New England. They built large and handsome houses similar to the ones they were accustomed to in England. Theophilus Eaton's house on Elm street, New Haven, had 19 fireplaces. John Davenport's just across the street had 13. One of the most interesting rooms in the Davenport house was the "study." Mr. Davenport spent so much time with his books that the Indians dubbed him "So Big Study Man."

New Haven and Hartford had been settled for 35 years before the settlement of Wallingford was undertaken. It was a formidable project at best. Unfriendly Indians were dangerous. Those who professed friendship were viewed with a wary eye. Wolves ran rampant and were a constant menace to man and beast. But men who had come to this New World to make new lives for themselves, had to have lands to cultivate, space to expand. Consequently a committee from New Haven granted lands held by New Haven for the new settlement of Wallingford upon the solemn promise of the planters to live the same sort of godly community life as the parent New Haven community did.

Wallingford grew. Farmers moved out in a northerly direction. The north part of the town, though owned by Wallingford, was not a part of Wallingford, writes Dr. C. H. S. Davis in his history of Wallingford and Meriden. With transportation difficult and little more than pathways for roads, farmers in the northern area found it an increasing annoyance to attend church meetings in Wallingford proper. The trip was particularly arduous in winter. Probably as early as December, 1724, these Meriden farmers held their own church services in homes. Some say there were meetings in the Daniel Hall homestead prior to the building of a meeting house.

During this same period Hartford was spilling southward in its parallel growth, not only to Wethersfield but to Berlin and on beyond. Thus did the Thomas Hooker influence from the north meet that of John Davenport from the south right here in Meriden. The melding here of the two communities is particularly evident in what happened to the Gilbert — later called

Belcher — farm in the northern part of Meriden.

The name of Meriden begins to figure in documents of Connecticut's history as early as August 28, 1661, when Jonathan Gilbert was granted by the Connecticut Colony "a farm to ye number of three hundred acres of upland and fifty acres of meadow." When he took possession of the property, Mr. Gilbert called it Meriden, although the spelling appears variously in documents as "Meridon," "Merrideen" or "Merridan."

Mr. Gilbert who was a man of considerable means and wide interests did not occupy his farm personally. It was first lived on by Edward Higbee as tenant, and later in 1686 was purchased by Gilbert's son-in-law, Andrew Belcher. The name Belcher has clung to the area down to present days. By purchase and grant Mr. Belcher added to his holdings until the property extended to the top of Mt. Lamentation.

In 1664 Edward Higbee rose in the world from his position as Mr. Gilbert's tenant to become a landholder in his own right. The land between the Gilbert property and Pilgrims' Harbour was deeded to him by a Hartford Indian. Records show that all the property north of Harbour Brook had been bought previously by New Haven in about 1638 from Montowese. The land being more accessible to Hartford than to the New Haven Colony, and the original right of the Indian to sell being questioned, positive ownership remained in doubt until Gilbert and later Higbee established their grants by occupation.

The land reaching to the edge of the "Meriden Farm" had been deeded to Wallingford in 1683 by John Talcott who had purchased it from Adam Puit, who in turn claimed title through an Indian deed. When the area now known as Meriden had its petition granted to be a parish of that name as a part of its parent Wallingford, the chance for further controversy about title to the lands was officially ended.

In years that followed attempts were made, successfully blocked by Wallingford where there was no desire to lose such a fast growing community, to separate the two parishes. While the struggle continued the part called Meriden lost to Berlin some parts of the original farm which gave the name to the community. The part of the original farm which extends from Corrigan's Corner to the southern part of Cat Hole Mountain went by petition to Berlin in 1798, and in 1803 another strip about a half



mile wide was added to Berlin in the same way.

Although Meriden lost some of the "Hookerites" in this fashion, there was left enough overlapping into the New Haven Colony influence to change the character of the community. It might be said Meriden was a melting pot into which converged fragments from those original migrations of organic communities to the north and to the south.

In *The Beginnings of New England*, John Fiske says that in these movements, not of individuals, but of whole communities, "united in allegiance to a church and a pastor, and fervid with the instinct of self-government, we seem to see Greek History renewed but with centuries of added political training." He writes that the government of the United States is in lineal descent more nearly related to that of Connecticut than to any of the other thirteen colonies. Connecticut's strength lay in the fact that it was a federation of independent towns with the individual communities retaining all the attributes of sovereignty not expressly granted to the General Court of the colony.

In 1643 New Haven Colony joined with Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, and Connecticut to form the United Colonies of New England. Soon after this Roger Ludlow was requested by the Connecticut General Court "to take some paynes in drawing forth a body of Lawes for the governing of this Comon welth." His code of laws was adopted four years later. A quite different code was put forth by the Colony of New Haven. These are the two documents so often referred to as the "Blue Laws," both containing precepts popularly supposed to be stiff-necked.

Connecticut Colony's John Winthrop was a man of great tact. Somehow he persuaded Charles II to sign in 1662 the Charter of Connecticut which gave that colony a freedom from the mother country enjoyed by no other British colony. It was possession of this Charter which persuaded New Haven Colony, albeit unwillingly, to unite eventually with Connecticut Colony.

So it is that Meriden, sitting in the middle between the two sections, occupied by people stemming from both, is marked by a fusion of the spirit of both. Meriden's character always contained considerable respect for the aristocratic and theocratic features of the original new Haven Colony, but was from the first permeated with fervent devotion to democratic principles characteristic of the founders of Connecticut Colony.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### Indians

IN NO PART of New England were the Indians so numerous as in Connecticut, says Dr. Davis in his history of Meriden and Wallingford. Deforest as an expert on Connecticut Indians estimated the number at from six to seven thousand. Other sources push the number considerably higher. (The quantity of fish, fowl, and game afforded by Connecticut made the area attractive to the Indians.) At any rate when John Davenport and his followers arrived in New Haven they found red men in possession.

The Mattabesitt tribe lived in and around the present site of Middletown, — “river Indians,” they lived near the waterway but roamed for great distances. At the time of the settlement of New Haven, Sowheag was the great sachem of the Mattabesitt tribe ruling from a fort on high ground near the narrows of the Connecticut River, his power extending over what are now Meriden and Wallingford. It was this sachem who sold the land to Davenport and his company.

To Sowheag, to the Quinnipiacs, and other Indians with any claim to the area taken over including East, North, and New Haven, Woodbridge, Orange, Branford, Cheshire, and Hamden in addition to Meriden and Wallingford, the well-to-do merchants from London via Boston paid in goods. Odell Shepard lists the payment to the Quinnipiacs at twenty-four coats, twelve hatchets, twelve hoes, two dozen knives, twelve spoons, twelve pewter porringers, and four cases of French knives and “sizers.”

The deed for the transaction with the Mattabesitts deals with the sachem’s son Mantowese, whose mother seems to have been the actual lineal inheritor of the land transferred. To Mantowese Davenport, Theophilus Eaton, et al., paid eleven coats made of trucking cloth, one coat for himself of English cloth, made after the English manner, and one reserve piece of land for planting what his small band of followers might need. It all seemed very friendly with a mutual agreement to make reparation for any



damages incurred by either side — by the Indians' dogs on the white man's cows or by the white man's hogs on the Indian corn.

Indians in this part of Connecticut actually welcomed the arrival of the English among them. They hoped to obtain assistance from the new settlers in defense against depredations of Pequots and Mohawks. Both of these tribes were constantly on the warpath and demanding tribute from weaker, less warlike peoples like the Mattabesitts.

Meriden was never used as a permanent camping ground by any tribe, but it was the happy hunting ground of both the Quinnipiacs and Mattabesitts, says Robert W. Seekamp, past president of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut and a Meriden resident. Mr. Seekamp has made an exhaustive study of Indian lore and Indian relics. We are indebted to him for the following information.

The Quinnipiacs numbered some 400 when the Davenport party purchased the New Haven area. For centuries they had lived at the East Haven site on New Haven harbor during the rigors of cold winters. Milder temperatures along the Sound and access to salt water game and shellfish attracted them to make their permanent home on the coast. During milder and warm weather they journeyed up the Quinnipiac river, making temporary campsites near spring holes or where game was most plentiful.

The trails followed by those Indians are today the highways we use. The road from Red Bridge to Cheshire was an Indian trail, as is also Capitol Avenue from West Main through the pass to Kensington, West Main to Milldale, East Main to the reservoir, and Preston Avenue from Baldwin to Westfield Road.

Temporary campsites have left their marks in the presence of a profusion of old weathered clam and oyster shells, flint and quartz chips and Indian artifacts. Such reminders of the Indian past have been found on the old Raven farm at Meriden airport, around the spring on Meeting House Hill, in the vicinity of Red Bridge and up on Allen Hill, in the hummocks north of Peat Works Pond, at the base of Mt. Lamentation near the Houston property, Spruce Glen, and down on the lower reaches of South Broad street.

The historian John Fiske says there can be little doubt that the material comfort of the Indians was for a time considerably im-

proved by their dealings with white men. Their want of foresight and thrift left them to face an annual struggle against famine during the harshness of winter. When the settlers came the Indians had a good market for the skin of every fur-covered animal they could catch. If trade didn't provide them with all they needed, they could count on the white man's charity.

Not only do Connecticut records show that every bit of land was obtained by honest purchase from the Indians, save for territory conquered in the Pequot war, but the general laws prove there was every intent to treat the Indians justly. No matter how good the white man's intentions, his way of life, his very aspirations that had brought him to the New World, made him interfere with the ways of the Indian. Even the friendly Indians of this section of Connecticut where Meriden is located, Indians who remained allies of the English first in the Pequot war and later in King Philip's War, found themselves pushed out in the march of progress.

After all it is hard to tell today how much the Indians actually understood what it meant to "sell" their property. They had known no such thing as private ownership of land as the white settlers understood it. They lived a tribal life. Their land belonged to the tribe for the use of everyone. They shared hunting and fishing rights on certain "preserves" with other tribes. Their idea of the "sale" of land on which Meriden now stands might very well have been that it was just a general invitation to white men to share the tribal privilege in return for which the white man would share his arts of defense against enemy tribes. We cannot be too smug about the purchase by which was acquired our Meriden heritage at the expense of the gradual eclipse of the red men who once hunted and fished the land and waters.

Remnants of the Mattabesitts became pitifully few. Hardly more remained of the Quinnipiacs. Land was bought for them eventually up Farmington way among the Tunxis, after their last sachem died on the old reservation held in East Haven. The Hartford Courant magazine section of January 22, 1956, carried a piece by Lawrence C. Nizza about the four remaining Indian Reservations in Connecticut. Situated in North Stonington, Ledyard, Kent, and Trumbull, they comprise together 799 acres and contain 15 houses. Only 23 recognized tribal members live

on the reservations part-time, or the year-round.

Most of the descendants of the original Indians have married with other ethnic groups. Integration is so complete that there seems no further need for reservations or special handling of "Indian affairs." How much of our Mattabesitts or Quinnipiacs from this section remains in the life blood of the present generation is a question. But the little knowledge we have of their presence here when the white men came adds that aura of antiquity to our history which gives it color. As Odell Shepard says the possession of even a little Indian lore deepens the Connecticut landscape enormously by lending the dimension of time.

Throughout Indian Connecticut, according to Shepard, it was believed that the men who lived in this place had a special access to the Divine. Indians here had a particular awe for stones. Indian lore has it that larger boulders in field and forest were kept always well supplied with offerings of corn or trailing moss. Huge rocks were chosen for council meetings. So we may believe that Meriden's Hanging Hills and the rocky promontories of Mt. Lamentation still echo with reverent, philosophical tributes from the Indian orators of the distant past.



## CHAPTER THREE

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### First Meeting Houses

AS EARLY as 1679 the people of Wallingford voted to build a "meeting house," a building 28 feet long, 24 feet wide and 10 feet high. So small was the group, and so burdened were they by poverty and the business of merely living, that it took several years for the completion of this small building. Two years later there was another vote, "to go on and finish the house." As their population and wealth increased, they enlarged this first meeting house to 40 by 28 feet. This was in 1690 when the town had grown to 73 families. The following year it was voted to "ceiling the house" and to build two pews. This was evidence of great luxury because, before this, seating arrangements had been long hard benches, occupied on one side of the house by men and boys, and on the other by females of the congregation. Growth and change continued, even as they do today, and in April 1706, we find "The town chose Deken Hall, Samuel Roys and Goodman Culvert, a commetee to procure workmen to come and buld gallers (galleries) for the In largement of the meeting hous."

During this time the people who lived on farms scattered about the north section of town had great difficulty in getting to meeting, especially in winter. Roads were scarcely more than paths through the woods and swamps, and horseback was the only means of transportation. Consequently, these devout people petitioned to hold their own religious services closer to their homes. On the town records of Wallingford, under the date of December 1, 1724, appears the following: "In respect of ye north farmers the town voated that they may hire a Minister four months this winter on their own charge." This vote was the first act that in any way separated the area of Meriden from Wallingford, or that recognized that these north farmers numbering 35 families, were a distinct community.

That same spring, at the May session of the General Assembly, this resolution was passed: "Upon the petition of the north farmers in Wallingford and those inhabiting the land northward of said Wallingford, commonly called Wallingford Purchase



Lands. This Assembly grants that they be a separate society for setting up and carrying on the publick worship of God among themselves, with all such liberties, powers and priviledges, as other such societies in this colony have and do by law enjoy . . . ” In May 1728 the farm of Meriden was added, and the parish from then on was known by that name.

Therefore, although there are no records to prove it, it can be assumed that after December 1724 the farmers of Meriden no longer made the arduous journey to Wallingford on Sunday, but had a place of worship in their own territory. There is a tradition that these services were held in the Daniel Hall homestead until the meeting house was built.

An entertaining tale, which may or may not be true, is often told in connection with the building of this first church in Meriden. According to the story, the farmers living in the most northerly section, along the old road, and those to the west, in Milking Yard and Pilgrim's Harbor, wanted the meeting house to be located near the junction of Curtis and Ann Streets; but those living to the east, near Dog's Misery, insisted that it be built nearer them, on what has since been called Meeting House Hill. Finally, it was settled that the building should be placed on the western slope of this hill, and the materials were collected there, ready for the actual "raising." During the night a group of the other faction — presumably the Royces, the Robinsons, the Collinses, the Coles, the Fosters and the Merriams — brought teams and hauled the timbers down the hill, over the brook, and westward, on what is now Ann Street, to the spot they preferred. This, naturally, caused a great furor, but eventually the Dog's Misery group won — the Yales, the Iveses, the Whitings, the Levits and the Halls. The men who had worked so hard in the night to carry out their scheme were forced to haul the material back up the hill in broad daylight, their ears, no doubt, ringing with the taunts of their adversaries.

At any rate, in 1727 the meeting house "about thirty feet square and built in the very plainest style" was erected on Meeting House Hill. The site, at what is now the corner of Ann Street and Dryden Drive, is marked by a large boulder placed there in 1904 by the First Congregational Society. The first burying ground in Meriden was about fifty rods to the east, near the top of the hill. Two years later the society resolved to form a Church,

and on October 22, 1729, after a day of fasting and prayer, the Church was duly organized with 51 original members.

The Reverend Theophilus Hall, of Wallingford, was the first preacher. He still held this post at the time of his death 30 years later. Toward the end of his life his salary was raised, but for many years it was £50 and firewood — about \$175 annually — a sum which might be paid in either money or provisions. Mr. Hall lived in a house at the southeast corner of Curtis and Ann Streets and he also owned a large farm in what is now the center of uptown Meriden. It was on a part of this farm, slightly east of the site of the present Center Church, that the second meeting house was erected, probably between 1752 and 1755. Unfortunately, the society records until 1755 are missing. Under the date of December 11, in that year, is found the first entry relating to the new church — a receipt for £150 advanced by Mr. Hall for building. Thus, it appears that the church was built by Mr. Hall, and that the society gradually repaid him.

This new meeting house, about 64 by 44 feet in size, replaced the earlier one which the society had outgrown in the 25 years since it had been built with such unchristianlike behavior on the part of its members. Originally, this second building had no bell nor steeple, but these were added in 1803. For 75 years this structure served continuously as a place of worship.

In 1831 the present Center Church was built on almost the same spot. This was about the first building of any architectural pretensions to grace our town. Together with its neighbor, the First Baptist Church, built in 1847, it still adds charm and beauty to our city today.

There was a division in the organization in 1848 when a part of the congregation moved with their pastor to the "Corner" in West Meriden and built a church there. Those who remained took the name of Center Congregational Church. The white colonial wooden church at the "Corner" was replaced in 1876 by the granite structure, located a little farther north on Colony Street, and known today as the First Congregational Church.

The Baptists have the next longest history in this area. The church which was organized in Wallingford, with about 10 families, in 1735 (or 1739) was the third Baptist Church in the entire colony. This church, however, ceased to exist after a time, but some of the families continued to hold to their faith, and in



1786 another Baptist Society, consisting of 12 members, was organized in Meriden. For several years after this, meetings were held in homes in the southeastern part of town. Their first house of worship was a dwelling purchased near the present dividing line of Meriden and Wallingford to accommodate Baptists living in both towns. In 1815 the Meriden Baptists built a second meeting house, nearer the center, on a site which is now the south corner of Broad and Charles Streets. This building was sometimes spoken of in derision as the "Salt Box," from its unpretentious appearance and scanty furnishings. Fifteen years later the society moved this house to a lot directly across the street, adjoining the Broad Street graveyard. At this time the structure was raised over a basement story, and was also adorned with a steeple. This remained the place of worship for the society until 1847 when they built the beautiful church which today stands almost next to the Center Congregational.

Here again, there appears to have been some argument, and no doubt tempers once more were hot, because the Congregational Society placed an injunction to deter the construction of this new church so close to theirs. It was pointed out that there was no objection to the Baptists "as a Christian people, as good neighbors and worthy citizens." The Congregationalists' argument was that the Baptist minister had "a peculiarly sharp ringing voice, so that beyond a question, he would disturb their society in worship."

The Episcopal Church in Meriden was organized about 1789 in the Moses Andrews homestead on West Main Street, now the home of the Meriden Historical Society. Samuel Andrews, a brother of Moses Andrews, was the last missionary to the Episcopal Church in Wallingford, in the service of "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts." When the Revolutionary War broke out all Episcopalians were suspected of being Tories, and Moses Andrews was forbidden to leave his farm without special permission of the town selectmen. After his petition to attend church in Wallingford was denied, Moses decided to have a church in his own home. Using slabs and blocks of wood from a neighboring sawmill as benches, he invited his neighbors in for weekly services, at which he was the lay reader. With these simple beginnings, a society was formally organized in 1789, preceded by a declaration of conformity to

the Church of England, and Moses became its first clerk. It was not until 1816 that a tiny wooden structure was built on the southeast corner of the old burying ground on Broad Street (probably the very spot where Olive Street is now) and consecrated as St. Andrew's Church.

Mrs. Frances A. Breckenridge in her charming book, *Recollections of a New England Town*, describes one of the festivals held in this first church: "In the very first years of the existence of St. Andrew's as a parish the yearly Christmas 'illumination', as it was then called, was with tallow candles. Wooden frames to fit the windows were so arranged that a candle was at each window pane. These panes were about seven by nine inches, and probably thirty panes to a window. The frames were carefully kept from year to year to be produced and used at the proper time. A chandelier of tin, precariously suspended from the arched ceiling in the center of the church, and side lights of tin fastened to the posts which supported the galleries, held the inevitable tallow candles. All of these that were accessible were duly visited once in a half hour or so by someone armed with the 'snuffers'. The inaccessible lights had to be left with toppling wicks to drip tallow onto whomsoever it might fall. The last illumination was in 1833 or 1834. Until the later years of the century the festival of Christmas was only observed by the small congregation that worshiped at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. Except, that persons from other denominations would attend there upon Christmas eve to hear the music. The little church was always crowded on these occasions, as their annual recurrence was the one musical event of the year."

This earlier church was replaced by "a new and elegant Gothic church of brownstone" in 1848. Within twenty years the increasing membership of the parish made it necessary to build a larger place of worship. Therefore, in 1866, this second church was taken down and the stone from it used for erecting the present St. Andrew's Church on East Main Street.

This, then, is the story of the three church societies established in Meriden during the eighteenth century, and of their houses of worship which, in the early days of the last century, clustered about the old burying ground on Broad Street.

One other denomination, the Methodist, was established in town before the middle 1800's. About 1830 a meeting house was



built on East Main Street. Mrs. Breckenridge has this to say about it: "Near the bars that lead into the East Cemetery is the barnlike Methodist Church, with its bare wooden benches and packing box pulpit. To this house, one bleak, snowy January day, queer 'Preacher' Baldwin brought his infant child to be baptized by himself, his wife the only witness. He had the grace and mercy to borrow a bowl of warm water . . . The building . . . was bought, moved onto Curtis Street and made into a joiner's shop. It was finally set on fire by some children playing in the old pulpit, and was burned to the ground." Actually, the Methodist Society was not organized until 1844, following a series of revival meetings held in what was known as "Old Bethel," a long shop owned by Charles Parker. Here the congregation sat on boxes which gave them a good view of the preacher. In summer a large tent was pitched in an open lot between High and Broad Streets. It was 1847 when the society built a wooden church on Broad Street near Charles. This was used until the First Methodist Episcopal Church, at the corner of East Main and Pleasant Streets, was erected in 1867.

Perhaps we should digress for a moment to discover what "going to meeting" was like in these early days of Meriden. First of all, the houses of public worship were never heated. Indeed, to have done so would have been considered a sign of degeneracy, if not of actual profanation. Even as late as 1831, when the present Center Congregational Church was built, "it was with great difficulty that the society could be induced even to allow chimneys to be built, though they were to be erected gratuitously." In winter the temperature must have been bitter for the people, many of whom had traveled several miles on horseback or on foot to reach the meeting house. The only artificial heat allowed was that from the women's foot stoves, little square metal boxes filled with glowing coals from the home hearth.

It has been told that men with bald spots were sometimes forced to put their mittens on their heads to keep warm; and preachers often complained that their voices were drowned by the noise of persons stamping their feet to keep them from freezing. The prayers, during which the congregation stood, were long and sermons even longer. In 1849 the Reverend George W. Perkins wrote, "As prayers and sermons then (before 1800) were much

longer than 'moderns' will endure, the winter hearers of those days must have endured a species of martyrdom. . . . As a partial relief to such suffering, some persons built near the church, what are often mentioned in the old records as 'Sabbath day houses' — little cabins about 10 feet square, finished with a fireplace, chimney and some chairs. Here the owner retired with his family at the intermission, and partook of some refreshment preparatory to the freezing process of the afternoon."

There were probably several Sabbath day houses around the first meeting house, and one was plainly mentioned in a deed of 1740, as standing on land north of the church. But the second meeting house must have had a rash of them, because at least 13, and maybe more, stood east and north of the church. The first entry on the land records referring to these houses was made on July 23, 1757, when Theophilus Hall deeded to "Deacon Benjamin Whiting, Ensign Amos Camp and Bezaleel Ives a spot of land sufficient for three Sabbath day houses with stables adjoining, of the dimensions of those now standing on said spot . . ." These men lived in the extreme southeast district, too far away for them to go to their homes during the "nooning" on Sundays. Also near the church stood two "Sabba' day" houses, each of which was 20 feet square and was probably shared by two or three families. According to Mrs. Breckenridge, "The one room had a fireplace, and the fuel and a barrel of cider were provided by 'joining'." This fireplace was also useful for replenishing the coals in the women's foot stoves.

Even in the second Congregational meeting house the seats must have been mere benches, because the story is told of a restless little girl who "slipped from the seat and made her way under the benches, on all fours, to the door where finally she was captured by her dismayed pursuers on the last step."

In addition to frigid temperatures in winter, hard seats and sermons "timed by an hourglass which was sometimes turned twice before the word 'lastly' was heard," the congregations of those days were plagued by the tithing man. He not only took up the collection, but kept order, particularly in the galleries, and tickled, with a fox tail or rabbit's foot on the end of a pole, those inclined to sleep, and also prevented anyone from leaving before meeting was ended.

The singing, too, was very different from our present idea of

church music. The two or three tunes, which never varied from one year to another, were keyed from a pitch pipe and were sung without benefit of instrumental accompaniment of any kind.

In old records there was frequent mention of a curious custom, that of "beating the drum" on the Sabbath. Since the early meeting houses had no bells, a substitute was found in a drum. According to the records of 1673, one "Sam'll Monson shall be allowed 40 s. for maintaining and beating the Drum in good order for the yeare ensuing."



## CHAPTER FOUR

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### Place Names

THE NAME of Meriden derived from "Meriden Manor" by which Andrew Belcher dignified the estate he owned by purchase from Jonathan Gilbert. Since the property is referred to as Meriden before it was acquired by Mr. Belcher, the supposition is that the choice was Gilbert's. There is no proof of why he selected the name. It has been suggested it was because it means "pleasant valley" and consequently was, and still is, an apt description of that part of Meriden.

Perkins' *Historical Sketches* gives a totally different explanation which has long been a popular folk story here. He says the name is compounded of "merry" and "den." Since there were so many merry meetings of travelers in the old stone house over which Andrew Belcher presided as host of the inn, the place acquired the affectionate nickname of "Merry-Den."

It is generally believed, however, that the true source of the name is Meriden, England. Nor is this assumption less prosaic than the folklore so suggestive of revels. Scenically, topographically, Meriden in Warwickshire is very like this piece of Connecticut. Furthermore it lies in the very center of England.

One of London's great daily newspapers carried some years ago a feature article on the British Meriden which remains to this day a quiet little town, quite outstripped in population and industry by her American namesake in Connecticut. The writer of the piece illustrated his feature by a drawing which represented a cut-out map of England poised in perfect balance on the tip of a sharply pointed pencil. The spot thus demonstrated as the exact center of England was the village of Meriden.

Meriden, Connecticut, is not the precise center geographically of its state. But its location earns the description of "central." Moreover it was certainly the center upon which converged the two strongest Puritan influences which fused into the democratic philosophy which in turn sired our American Constitution.

There is a little story related by Odell Shepard in his *Connecticut Past and Present* which says a visiting Frenchman in



Washington to study our form of government heard of one famous American after another who had been born in Connecticut. He looked in an atlas to discover the location of this phenomenal place and found it to be "only a little yellow spot on the map." Years later he was called upon for a Fourth of July oration before a group of Americans in Paris. He spoke of Connecticut as "that little yellow spot on the map that makes the clock-pedlar, the schoolmaster, and the senator. The first of these gives you time; the second tells you what to do with it; and the third makes your law and civilization."

Meriden has produced its clock-pedlars, schoolmasters and senators. She is typical Connecticut. Odell Shepard also speaks of the way "Meriden crouches . . . beside her mounded hills." Between her hills there are valleys, ponds, and streams still known by names used by the earliest settlers. For instance Jonathan Gilbert's first grant of land was specified as in the "vicinity of Cold Spring." Derivation of that name is easily understood since waters welling out of masses of rocks there are sparkling and cold.

Professor Silliman wrote about Cold Spring for the *American Journal of Science* back in 1821. He described a natural icehouse in the masses of fallen trap rock where "ice remains usually the year around." He said the small brook running to the south of the natural icehouse has "been known to the youth of the vicinity since the middle of last century, so they have been accustomed to resort to this place, in parties, for recreation, and to drink the waters of the cold-flowing brook." At one time Cold Spring was a projected spa on which considerable sums of money were spent for development.

Nearby "Cat Hole" no doubt was so called because wild animals posed a peculiar threat in that narrow cleft between rocky hills through which one of the earliest known paths was trodden. According to Doctor Davis in his history, Crow Hollow, the "locality near Julius Parker's shops about two miles west of the city," has an equally obvious source. There were a great many crows wont to congregate in the vicinity. "Bangall" on the road toward Middletown derived its name, he says, from the fact that Captain Benjamin Hall who kept a tavern on the Noah Pomeroy place, said a party from Middletown continued their frolics there throughout one night and "banged all creation."

Pilgrim's Harbor, sometimes without an apostrophe and sometimes with the apostrophe after the S, was the name of the southwestern part of Meriden through which Harbor Brook runs. It was called by that name in an Indian deed of 1664. Barber's history written in 1838 says the name came from a tradition about the regicides said to have stopped there in their wanderings. But the assumption now is that the name, antedating those flights of regicides from political persecution, came from the fact that the area offered some protection from cold and winds in the nature of a "harbor."

Black Pond still earns its name without question. Dog's Misery nearby, south of the Middletown road, was a morass thickly covered with tangled vegetation where wild animals took refuge from the chase to the complete bafflement and sometimes to the death of dogs on their trail. Meeting House Hill naturally acquired its name from its selection as the site of the first house of worship in Meriden.

Hanging Hills is another name entirely obvious in origin. Falls Plains and Little Plain were once in common usage for the section now referred to as Hanover and the upper section extending toward the old main road to Hartford. The first title also obviously got its name from the falls in the river going through the plain — a plain that was apparently regarded most favorably by the pioneers since it was one of the first areas to be staked off into lots.

Turning back to the northeastern section of Meriden, Mt. Lamentation broods over the landscape. The Reverend Charles A. Goodrich of Hartford writes the story of the source of that name. It is a grim tale about a man named Chester who lost his bearings one dark and stormy day. He wandered for two days and nights, barely escaped plunging off a precipice, and became slightly demented; and was loudly lamenting before a searching party found him. The Goodrich book in which this tale appears is called *Stories on the History of Connecticut: Designed for the Instruction and Amusement of Young Persons*. If the Lamentation story is a good sample, the nature of the revered gentleman's idea of amusement might well be questioned by current censors of juvenile literature.



## CHAPTER FIVE

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### Old Houses

THERE ARE still standing in Meriden today a number of homes which were built in the eighteenth century. Some have been carefully preserved through the years, others have been lovingly restored, and a few have been so altered that it is difficult to recognize them for what they are.

The oldest house in town is undoubtedly the 1711 Club Inn, on North Colony Street. As its name implies, it was built in that year, by one Solomon Goffe of Wethersfield. His deed gave this indefinite description of the property, "the farm is in the woods and bounds west on the Country road and extends north, east and south." The chimneys in the cellar of this house are enormous and the stones are cemented with clay mixed with straw, as are the foundation walls. The old rafters, huge floor beams, and split laths also indicate the age of the building. The first addition to the house, which looks as old as the rest, was probably made by Jonathan Collins who bought the property in 1729. At present it is, as it has been for a number of years, a popular eating place.

Less than a mile north of here, on the west side of the road, on a bank protected by a stone wall, stands the Stephen Bailey place. This was built in 1734 by John Dennie, a rich Boston merchant who never occupied the house but leased it and the farm to someone else. It, too, has an early addition on the north side. This place has been very well kept, and must look much as it did 200 years ago.

Some little distance farther, at 1376 North Colony Road, is an old house belonging now to Wallace Miramant, florist. One of the most interesting things about it is that it stands on the site of the old Belcher Tavern. Although this house is unquestionably old, it is not known exactly when it was built, nor by whom. However, its hand-hewn white oak beams proclaim its age. In *A Century of Meriden*, Mr. Curtis suggests, as the result of a conversation he had with the granddaughter of Sidney Merriam, who came into possession of the inn about 1812, that in 1833 the old building was moved to the rear for a wood shed and carriage house,



and the present house was erected on the ancient site. However, it appears to be older than this, and the contractor who supervised its remodeling in 1949, felt that it was one of the oldest houses in town. At one time it had eleven fireplaces. The present owner has carefully stowed away in his attic an old sign, found in the place, bearing the words "Hotel Belcher."

On the other side of the road, at number 1563, is the Yale place, built in 1788 by John, a grandson of that John Yale who, in company with Jedediah Norton, bought the Belcher, or Meriden, farm in 1741. This house has had some additions and has had its clapboards replaced with shingles, but its earlier lines are clearly discernible. It is owned and occupied by the Staszewski family.

Also in the north part of town, at 1065 Broad Street, near Britannia, is the Asahel Curtis place. This house was built, probably by Joel Yale, in 1807 but was sold to Isaac Lewis and Asahel Curtis a few years later. In a building adjoining, these two men manufactured metal buttons. After a time Mr. Curtis bought the house from his partner. Here his son, George R. Curtis, was born. For many years now the place has belonged to Frank N. Wilcox. It has apparently changed little since its early days, except to improve.

The Andrews Homestead, on West Main Street, now the home of the Meriden Historical Society, was built by Moses Andrews probably about 1760. The double overhang of the second and third stories indicates that it may be even older. This house, like so many others, was enlarged at an early date. When the sloping roof was raised to accommodate the addition in the rear, the old end rafters were left and are still visible in the attic. The massive timbers, sturdy wall planking, and wide floor-boards are still in remarkably fine condition. In one of the bedrooms an area of the wall has been cut away so that the glassed-off section shows the construction — the hand-hewn beams, hand-split laths, hand-wrought nails, and wooden pegs. The place is an excellent example of a large, comfortable, colonial farmhouse. It follows the usual plan of that day — the small entrance hall, where the delicately turned bannisters contrast strikingly with the rugged stones of the huge center chimney; to the right the dining room, to the left the withdrawing room, each with its fireplace; and in the rear the keeping room, with its enormous cooking fireplace, complete with Dutch ovens. It was in this

house that the first Episcopal church services in Meriden were held.

In later years the place passed through a succession of hands, becoming, at one time, a two-family house. It was acquired by the Board of Education for the City of Meriden, and in 1933 and 1934 was renovated as a federal project to serve as a kindergarten for the Benjamin Franklin School, and a colonial museum for the city. In 1940 when the School Board relinquished control of the property, two groups, the Andrews Homestead Committee and the Meriden Historical Society, which had been defunct since 1895, united to save the old house. This was accomplished and the Homestead, repaired, redecorated, and furnished with antiques which had been given or loaned to the society, was the scene of an Open House, January 14, 1942. The following year, because of the war, the place was turned over to the city for a Child Care Center, and its furnishings were returned to their owners or safely stored for the duration.

Then in 1952 the Meriden Historical Society was again revived and once more took over the Andrews Homestead. It has been beautifully redecorated and furnished, insofar as possible, with antiques of the period of 1760. In it, also, are housed collections of old books, papers, and souvenirs of Meriden's past. Certainly, Moses Andrews built well, and our town is fortunate to have such a fine old house for its historical museum.

Meriden is likewise fortunate in possessing the Meriden Historical Society in its reactivated form, destined to perpetuate and augment the house and contents of the Andrews Homestead. Originally the society was organized in 1893 after a year of planning for its proper functions. Papers were prepared for reading at subsequent meetings, many of which are preserved in a book housed at the Andrews Homestead and from which considerable information has been gleaned for this volume. Despite the obviously general interest in the organization's efforts to gather material on Meriden's past, there seems to have been no meeting after the one dated November 1, 1895.

When the fate of the Andrews Homestead became a matter of public concern in 1940, the Meriden Historical Society was reorganized to include the already active Andrews Homestead Committee for the purpose of raising funds to maintain the property as a center of historic interest. For the two years before



the Andrews Homestead "went to war" the society more than fulfilled its mission.

After 10 years of wear and tear in community service, the Homestead was in dire need of the attentions which only an active Historical Society could give it. The organization was again revived, its constitution brought up-to-date, and concentrated work begun to make over this handsome relic of Meriden's past. With financial aid from the Cuno Foundation, the work has been completed. It is unthinkable that the museum should ever again fall into other ways and other uses. The Meriden Historical Society has become a necessary and vital function in Meriden's affairs depended upon to carry on without interruption the preservation of Meriden's past as a symbol of all that makes Meriden happy and proud in celebrating in 1956 its sesquicentennial year.

Still farther west, on Johnson Avenue at the corner of Eaton, stands the old Johnson place, now owned and occupied by the Carter Whites. This house, with its lovely Palladian window and hand-pegged divided stairway, was built by Israel Johnson about 1785. In the early days West Main Street, as we know it, did not exist and Johnson Avenue was the through street to the west and later the stagecoach route to Waterbury. Originally this house faced south on Johnson Avenue, but at a later period was turned to face east on Eaton. The Johnson family owned the mountain land to the north — all the way up to West Peak. They had hoped to develop the property into a valuable mining tract but, unfortunately, their prospecting did not reveal the wealth of gold and copper they had expected to find. In spite of this disappointment, however, the family lived in rather an elegant manner, and rumor has it that it was considered quite an honor to be invited to their home.

On Coe Avenue, within a short distance of each other, are two good examples of eighteenth century houses. One is the home of Victor Lucchini, Coe Farm, which has just been sold to the city as the site of the new west-side high school. This colonial house was here when the farm was sold by Samuel Rice to Asa Barnes in 1795. Calvin Coe bought it in 1820 and it has remained in the hands of his descendants until now. It is to be hoped that this lovely old home can be saved when the high school appears in the place where the house has stood for over



160 years.

The second house is the Rice place, built in 1781, by Ezekiel Rice, Jr., a Revolutionary War soldier, on land given him by his father. Its style is somewhat different from most of the houses of this period, because instead of one large center chimney, it has two, one at each end, and has a hallway running through the center of the house. Until fairly recent years, this place was still owned and occupied by members of the Rice family.

On Old Colony Road, at Archer's Corners, is the Deacon Robert Royce, or Rice, house. It was standing there in 1740 when the highway running west from this spot on the old Country Road to Hanover, now South Meriden, was opened. In the latter part of the last century the place was sold to the wife of Dr. H. A. Archer — hence the name Archer's Corners. In 1906 this house had a porch on two sides. Now that has been removed and so today, in spite of some recent shingling, the house probably looks more as it did originally.

Just north of this old Robert Rice farm, on the site of Walnut Grove Cemetery, was the farm bought by Dr. William Hough, Wallingford's second physician, in 1730. Sometime between then and 1740, when he moved to Cheshire, Dr. Hough built a house on this property. His son, William, continued to live and conduct a blacksmith shop here for many years. About 1930 Mr. Russell White bought this Hough home from the cemetery association, moved it piece by piece, and carefully reconstructed it in its present location at the corner of Broad Street and Gale Avenue. There it may be seen today, exactly as it stood for almost 200 years in its first location — complete even to its oversized chimney and fireplaces. Looking at it, one would never guess that it had not been right there for all of its long existence. It is now the home of the Robert Bergers.

A short distance up Broad Street, at 309, is the Benjamin Hart house, now owned by the John B. Kirbys. This was built in its present location just before 1800. The original house faced on Curtis Street and was built in 1729 by Captain John Webb. When Mr. Hart inherited the home he wanted it to front on the new turnpike, and so he tore it down and built the present house, using many of the beams and other material from the old house.

Around the corner, at 54 Curtis Street, is the Benjamin Curtis

house, owned by John Molloy. The first Benjamin Curtis, in 1729, acquired from his father, Nathaniel, a 200-acre farm fronting on this old street and spreading out fanlike to the east. For many years the Curtis family continued to inhabit this section of town, which accounts for the frequency of the name here. This house was built probably about 1795, by the second Benjamin when his own homestead, a short distance south, became too small to hold all of his fourteen children. The house has outwardly changed very little with the years.

Five houses beyond is the home of Mrs. Charles N. Flagg. This is also reputedly a Curtis house, but when it was built, and by which Curtis is not certain. The back ell part was evidently the original house and the main building was added in front, somewhat later. The inside was extensively remodeled when the Flaggs bought the place about thirty-five years ago, but the outside still preserves its original colonial lines.

Directly across the street is an attractive white-washed brick, which is now the home of Mrs. William H. Race. The long, narrow, rectangular building was built originally for a spoon factory, probably by Edwin E. Curtis whose home was at 112 Curtis Street and is still standing. Later it was a dame school conducted by Miss Harriet Bradley. After awhile it fell on bad times and became a disreputable looking two-family tenement, referred to in the neighborhood as "the brick." About ten years ago the Races bought it and converted it into the serene and charming home it is today.

One of the oldest houses in Meriden is at 160 Curtis, the home of Mrs. Marion P. Heidel. It was built in 1730 by Lazarus Ives. In 1740 Daniel Bradley owned it and had his blacksmith shop here for a time. Then the house was sold to Daniel Hough, the father of Dr. Ensign Hough, who with his family lived in it for many years. After that it had a number of owners, and during the Victorian era was considerably changed. Some years ago the Heidels remodeled it and removed much of the ornateness, so today, although not quite in its original form, it still retains its early charm.

Far down on Curtis Street, almost to the Wallingford line, stands a house which was built about 1778 or 1780 by Noah Yale for his son, Thomas. This house was originally on a lane which ran up to Yale Avenue, because this section of Curtis



Street was not opened until 1820. There is a story that in the early part of the last century this place was used as an inoculation hospital, on account of its remoteness, and because it was not on a highway. It can easily be located, since it is at present known as the Mother Goose Farm.

Almost directly east of this house, on Yale Avenue, is one built by this same Noah Yale for himself in 1761. He was a grandson of the original Thomas Yale to whom a large farm in this section of Wallingford was granted sometime before 1702. Noah Yale's house was certainly a fine, dignified colonial farmhouse, containing much good paneling and detail. Many meetings of the Congregational Society were held here before the Revolutionary War. This was also the home of the slave, Chatham Freeman, who earned his freedom by serving in the war in place of one of Mr. Yale's sons. Another story is told of this same slave. Mr. Yale had a female slave at his farm whom Freeman wanted to marry. His master said he would agree to the marriage if Freeman would work for him seven years. He did and then married the woman. Today, almost two hundred years later, this house is still owned and occupied by Noah Yale's descendant — his great, great, great grandson, David Yale.

The Ephriam Berry house, now owned by Frederick M. Stevens, Jr., stands on the northeast corner of Parker Avenue and Ann Street. This house was almost certainly built in 1743. Its construction is excellent, there are fine details such as cupboards and paneling, and it has been carefully preserved through the years. It is probably one of the finest examples of an early colonial home to be found in Meriden.

There is, on the south side of Miller Avenue, a red house called the 1777 Rest Home, owned and managed by Mrs. Edward Punty. It is not certain who built it, but a story about it has been handed down from father to son in that section for years. According to this tale, the man could not decide just where he wanted his home built. One day he walked to the top of the hill on his property, and taking off his hat he flung it into the wind, which was blowing strongly from the west, and said, "Where the hat falls I will build my house." And so he did. This place was occupied in the last century by Richard Miller whose name remains in that of the street.

On the northwest corner of Miller Avenue and Paddock, which



in the early days was called Misery Road, is the Silas Rice place. This house occupies the site of the dwelling of Captain Divan Berry, of Revolutionary fame, which was destroyed by fire in 1796. On October third of that year, Deacon Silas Rice bought the half finished house which was being erected on the same spot. Even now, appearing much as it did when the Deacon completed it, this house is occupied by Robert S. Rice, a direct descendant of the builder.

Farther north, on the east side of Paddock Avenue, is the large farmhouse which was built by Isaac Hall, son of the doctor of the same name, about the year 1770. For a long time this was known as the Rollin S. Ives place. In recent years its walls have been shingled, which helps to conceal its ancient character.

Still farther east, away over in what used to be called Dog's Misery, is the old Noah Pomeroy place. The first mention of this house in the records was in March 1751, when Israel Hall and his wife deeded it and sixty acres of land to Phineas Hall. It is the same place where Benjamin Hall was later supposed to have kept the tavern which gave the section the name Bangall. About 1816 or 1817 it was bought by Noah Pomeroy. At that time it stood at the junction of Pomeroy and Murdock Avenues, but many years ago it was moved a few hundred feet to the east, and now it stands at 24 Ives Avenue. It was in this old house that the Universalists first assembled in 1821. Some thirty years later the First Universalist Society of Meriden was organized.

Dr. Sherburne Campbell owns a home on East Main Street, near the corner of Maple Avenue. This was apparently one of several houses built by Samuel Baldwin. The date is given as 1772, although it probably was earlier. The Almon Hall family was the first to live here. Two of his children, Russell and Fanny, continued to occupy the place for many years, until they died at an advanced age. The story is told that Miss Fanny, in her last years, became confused and was inclined to wander about. In order to keep her safely in the house, it is said, she was chained to an iron ring fastened into the floor of her room. In recent years this house passed through a number of different hands. It has been carefully restored, added to, and today is a perfect example of how an eighteenth century home can be adapted to comfortable, modern living.

Another house, no doubt of somewhat similar style when it

was built about 1795, is the Orchard Guy place on the corner of East Main and Williams Street. A short distance east of here is the Abel Yale place which is considerably older. The first mention of it on the records was in 1737 when his brother, Moses, quit-claimed to Abel all his interest in the house and farm. During the years a number of additions have been built, and its appearance has changed considerably. It is on the corner of East Main and Horton Avenue.

Some other early homes which have lost much of their colonial appearance through alterations and additions are the Edward Collins house (1738) at 596 Colony Street; the Abel Rice or William W. Plumb place (1733 or before) at 175 Hall Avenue, near the junction of Gale; the Comfort Butler house (1770) at 67 Kensington Avenue; and that of Levi Allen (before 1784) on Allen Avenue.

One of Meriden's oldest houses has come to rather a pathetic end. It is now a three-family tenement, with a storeroom tacked on the front. This is the home built originally by Captain Nathaniel Merriam, about 1730, on the present site of Saint Andrew's Church. In 1866 it was moved, around the corner, to Miller Street where it now stands, looking sad and forlorn, behind the Connecticut Electric Equipment Co.

Probably no description of Meriden's old houses would be complete without mention of the stately Eli Birdsey mansion, even though it was built considerably later — not until 1830. It was the first imposing residence to be erected in town. It has now been made into apartments, but it is still dignified and beautiful today, in its commanding location at the head of East Main Street hill, almost across from the two colonial churches, and in Meriden's most historic section.



## CHAPTER SIX

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### Roads and Travel

THE FIRST settlers in what is now Meriden entered virtually virgin territory. This was not an area where Indians lived with any permanence. It was their hunting ground so there were some Indian trails winding in and out where moccasined feet had picked the way. Some of our streets today no doubt follow the general lines of such trails. Gradually those trails become trodden ways beaten down by men on horseback. Later they were widened into roads and new roads added as the settlement grew.

In 1729, George W. Perkins tells us in his history, there were twenty-five families in Meriden. By 1770 the number had expanded to 123 families. Meanwhile some sort of rude roadway system was developing. One record shows that the General Assembly in Hartford in 1666 ordered Edward Higby thus: "for making and mainteining the way over Pilgrums Harbour passable for man & horse, shall have his estate and farme free of Countrey (rates) for this yeare and next, he mainteining the way soe longe as aforesaid."

As time went on a definite pattern emerged for reserving quite a wide strip of land for roads wherever new grants were made. For instance in 1707 the "towne chose Eliezer peeck, Joshua culver, David Hall, a commetie to see that dogs missery hiway may not be pinsht of the twenty rods in any place from the town to misserie whare it was not laid out before the graint was of said hiway."

Twenty rods is often mentioned as road width. Still oftener the records speak of six rods for a highway. What the roads were like is another matter. Other records indicate that it was customary for settlers adjacent to these "roads" to raise crops on this public property. Since the strips were cleared but not too well traveled, it was but a practical custom, quite "Yankee" in character.

According to historian Perkins the first wagon was brought to Meriden in 1789. He says it was owned by Ezra Rice and was of rude construction, being simply a square framed box placed



on four wheels, drawn by two horses, with ropes for traces, and cords for the guiding or driving lines. Yet, he says, "it was then thought to be a very elegant establishment." Previous to the coming of that wagon, there had never been owned in the town more than three two-wheel carriages. These he describes as being very rude, awkward chaise bodies or uncovered seats hung on two wheels. And he adds incidentally that he had it on what he considered good authority, that of a man whose business took him at various times into every house in the town (could he have been a tax collector?), that in 1802 there was but one carpet in the whole town of Meriden. As a further commentary on Meriden's standard of living when she became a separate town, the *Century of Meriden* carries the note that when Samuel Yale died in 1816, the inventory of his belongings contains the first notice we have of a stove in Meriden. The item appears on that document as "stove and pipe" valued at \$10.

Among papers written by Meridenites for the historical society in the eighteen-nineties, is one by Allan B. Squire on the railroad. In it he says the "first stage in Connecticut ran through Meriden in 1784 on this old country road west of the central village where the railroad is now located." He adds that until the time the railroad was completed over half a century later the "good people of Meriden had no other means of communication with Hartford and New Haven except by private conveyance." On that subject of private conveyance Welcome E. Benham says in his paper in 1894: "I well remember that 60 years ago it was quite common for persons to travel from town to town, several miles on foot. I and others sometimes walked to New Haven and back, 32 miles, and quite frequently to church on Sabbath to Cheshire Center, four miles from home. . . ."

"Horse wagons were nearly all of the lumber box order, with wood axletrees. The back chair seat was often supported on a wooden spring; the forward seats were plain flat boards resting on the upright sides. It was considered a luxury to have cushions or blankets on them to alleviate the jolting over stone. When elliptic springs were first introduced, they were considered a marvel, and set the body of the wagon up so high that some feared danger of toppling over. . . ."

He describes the stages as "uniformly built in egg or oval body form, capable of seating from six to ten inside, and with additional

seats outside up back of the driver and on top." A large leather boot was built on behind to carry trunks and baggage, and also another in front to protect the driver. The whole was set on strong leather side straps called "thorough braces," suspended from elevated points front and rear, each resting firmly on the heavy four-wheeled running gear, and gave "an easy, rollicking motion to passengers when driven rapidly over rough places." The wide-awake drivers were "well skilled in handling their four lines and cracking their long lash stage whips over the backs of their forward span of galloping steeds. On approaching their stopping place they blew their shrill tin horn to notify hostlers to have fresh horses harnessed ready for exchange. There was one stage a day each way from New Haven and Hartford, a distance of thirty-six miles, running time four hours."

When George W. Perkins describes travel in the earliest days, a century before the above, he says: "... you see a traveller starting from Hartford, on his way to New Haven. He is on horseback, with heavy saddle-bags depending from the saddle, and perhaps with pistols at his saddle-bow. After passing Wethersfield, he drives into the forest, where there is only a 'bridle path' cut through the trees. Slowly picking his way among stumps and swamps, with now and then some trepidation as an Indian crosses his path, he reaches toward nightfall the old stone house called Meriden, and is glad to find that its stout doors and shutters can resist all hostile attacks. The next morning, at early dawn, he commences another hard day's journey, and has hardly gone beyond the tavern door, when he spies a troop of gaunt wolves upon Mount Lamentation."

One of the historical papers, written in 1893 by Albert H. Wilcox, adds this about the stone house: "As the journey between Hartford and New Haven formerly occupied 'two good days' the Belcher Tavern and another tavern in Wallingford became very notorious resorts especially during the French and Revolutionary wars. Afterwards a wooden addition was built which was kept as a tavern until the opening of the turnpike in 1799." He also speaks of Bartlett's "Hotel Belcher" being built in the 1820's near the old tavern and its adjoining forts.

Perkins describes how the horseman, in prestagecoach days, was almost bemired in passing the swamp and unbridged stream at Pilgrim's Harbor. It was no wonder the regular horseback



trail from Hartford swung by way of Wethersfield rather than along the shorter route later taken by the railroad. As A. B. Squire describes that route it is obvious how much swampy ground had to be reclaimed. He speaks of the railroad passing by "Old Fly" and "Beaver Pond" through meadows called "Green Swamp" into Kensington parish and thence to its termination on Main Street in Hartford.

The first step in progress from Indian trail to airplane came with the advent of freight wagons and stagecoaches. The pack-horse business had been profitable since it was the only means by which to transmit mail and goods. So owners of the pack-horse business were opposed to the "new-fangled" freight system which called for the building of roads, just as later the stagecoach companies opposed the coming of railroads, and railroads in turn look askance at trucking on highways.

New highways passable for stagecoaches cost considerable in money and effort. Neither state nor towns could keep them up although some stretches were entrusted to the good offices of settlers receiving land usage or other benefits in payment. So the stage lines obtained charters from the state allowing them to establish turnpikes, either by taking over and improving existing roads, or by building their own with necessary bridges.

The first turnpike through Meriden was completed in 1799, a big event in our history. Its building was the opening of what is known as Broad Street. It necessitated the filling in of a deep ravine which people called Nabb's Folly since a man of that name had tried to build a road across it and failed. According to Mrs. William Mackensie in a paper prepared some 30 years ago for the D. A. R., it was "an uncommonly deep chasm, through which ran a rapid, narrow stream of water." In her younger school days she says it was known as the "Gulf."

The turnpike builders filled in the ravine enough to allow a narrow road across it, although people had previously thought it could never be filled and made safe. That sort of hazard was many times multiplied before Connecticut villages were finally connected by their network of turnpikes, now replaced by one of the finest and most comprehensive road systems in the nation.

The north-south turnpike was soon traversed by an east-west route to the further advantage of the old Central Tavern as a convenient stopping place. Returning to Mr. Benham's paper we



find a description of the toll turnpikes where gates across the pike forced travelers to stop to pay their fee before they could continue. Generally the gates were of the high fence type that swung, some were pivoted on a pole, and others were raised by pulleys and weights from a high roof overhead. There were gatekeepers who took the toll to fill the coffers of the turnpike companies so they could maintain the system in at least passable condition.

According to Mills in his *Story of Connecticut* the usual toll was from 25 cents for a four-wheeled pleasure carriage down to four cents for a rider on horseback. But people going to and from churches on Sunday were allowed to pass free, as were voters on their way to town meeting or farmers enroute to mills. Funerals were always free. Mr. Benham places one toll gate on the north-south turnpike on South Broad Street midway between Meriden and Yalesville and another north of the Berlin woods midway between Meriden center and Berlin. On the east-west turnpike he says one gate was about a "mile west at the old notch road corners just beyond the Parker foundry."

The turnpike companies also erected milestones along these post roads. Some that once stood in the vicinity of Meriden are still preserved although not in their original locations. The *Century of Silver* recounts the recent story of two such markers. One was on Colony Street in front of the house occupied until her death by Miss Sally Collins, and since torn down to make way for new construction. Only a few feet south of the Post Office, this stone indicating 19 miles from New Haven was dear to "Miss Sally's" heart. To her horror one day she looked out just in time to see a steam shovel scoop the stone up in its gnawing way preparing for a new street surface job.

Tearfully Miss Sally told the workmen of her shock. They were sympathetic and toted the chipped relic to land behind her house. Later she gave the stone to Roy C. Wilcox who subsequently located milestone 20 far out North Colony Street in front of what was Judge Dunn's house, the old Norton place. Mr. Wilcox, possessed of respect for Meriden's historical relics, has the two milestones flanking the doorway of his present residence on Allen Hill.

Such stone markers have proved more durable than some of the many markings used in the early 1700's. Land records and

those covering space reserved for roads commonly use such terminals as "a heap of stones in the corner of the fence west of the Path" and a "walnut bush marked with stones" or a "white oak tree" to the "large chestnut stump."

A trail ran from New Haven to Hartford down in the bottom of the valley through swampy land for a century before the turnpike was built. This was developed into a road sometime after the turnpike came into being, roughly along the line of the present Colony Street. The sandstone hill on which the center of old Meriden grew, and its connecting ridges made far better terrain for the first full-fledged highway. John Warner Barber notes in his *Connecticut Historical Collections* that a road was constructed in the northwestern part of Meriden to Berlin sometime in the second decade of the 1800's. He says it went through "a narrow and romantic glen, between two ridges of the Blue Mountains; this pass, which is more than a mile in extent, is called Cat Hole."

In some parts of the glen, continues Mr. Barber, there was barely room for a path because angular fragments of rock protruded at a forty-five-degree angle. He says the rocks were beaten down and covered with earth brought in for the purpose in order to make what might be called a road. He also calls attention to the elevated perpendicular rock on one side of the road which once resembled the profile of a human face, some saying it looked just like George Washington. Today one's imagination has to be pretty good to see what may have been far more sharply defined 150 years ago. But the Washington legend lingers.

Stagecoaches took four days to go from New York to Boston. The second day out of New York meant the passengers and drivers had their noon meal in Meriden. This is why the Central Tavern became in reality the heart of the town, shifting the center from its former location at the junction of Curtis and Ann Streets. A Hartford newspaper dated May 31, 1838, carries the story of the fastest trip ever made from New York to Hartford as eight hours and five minutes, actual time by steamboat and stage. And the time consumed by stage from New Haven to Hartford was four hours and ten minutes, including stops for changes of horses and rest periods for passengers. The coming of the railroad changed everything. For a century and a half before it, communication between Meriden and the outer world



was a slow process.

All travelers were of interest to Meriden townspeople. Sometimes very important figures came this way. According to Mills in his *Story of Connecticut*, George Washington traveled from New Haven to Hartford on his way from Philadelphia to Cambridge in 1775, presumably on the route we call Colony Street. Again in 1789 he made a tour from New York and through New Haven and Hartford on his way to Springfield and Boston. One legend, entirely without authentication in any record, says that Washington stopped overnight on one of these tours in a house on North Colony Road that has long since disappeared from our landscape.

Mr. Benham tells in the historical society collection of papers of the visit to Meriden of a later President. He writes:

"I recall with interest the memorable occasion in about 1829 when General Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, made his tour through New England, and in going from New Haven to Hartford by carriage he stopped off uptown and gave an open air public reception from the stone steps of the Center church. He was greeted by quite a concourse of people, introduced by General Walter Booth, and shook hands with a large number of prominent men, passing one by one in line. He had bright eyes, his gray hair stood up above his forehead, and as a venerable, brave looking man he appeared worthy of his high position. After this brief patriotic reception he and his honorable escorts, including Martin Van Buren, re-entered their carriages and proceeded to Hartford. Dr. Isaac I. Hough was then landlord of the old Center hotel where the New Haven and Waterbury stages always stopped."

The stage drivers were colorful figures themselves. It took considerable skill to manage the job. In addition the personality of the driver had much to do with making stagecoach travel popular. All sorts of legends surround those figures of stagecoach days, so imposing in their great coats and tall beaver hats. Quite naturally the drivers were "treated" by passengers at their stops at way stations. The story is that sometimes the drivers were sharp businessmen who arranged with innkeepers to get a cut on profits. In a sort of version of the "wooden nutmeg" legend it is said that it was a common custom for the innkeeper to serve the driver colored water when giving his treater the usual rum



or whiskey. Thereafter he and the driver could split the profit made on the harmless substitute.

One of the famous stagecoach drivers lived in Meriden, Silas Lawrence, whose home was on Broad Street. Since the Central Tavern was a logical place for changing horses, there was a large barn nearby for housing them. That building was still standing until the second decade of this century. It was used for many years before by John Holmes' tinsmith shop.

The stagecoach business was but a part of the turnpike's importance. Much freight was carried over the road, particularly in the winter months when the Connecticut River was closed to navigation by ice. The freight teamsters customarily made the Central Tavern an overnight stop. Freight was carried usually in long heavy wagons with high board sides and arched canvas tops, drawn by from four to ten horses according to the weight of the load and the depth of the season's mud. These wagons gradually disappeared from this area as new transportation methods developed. They went westward and were later known as "prairie schooners" when figuring in the vast settlement projects that opened our continent. When we remember that Fulton's steamer made its trial trip in 1807, we can realize how essential stagecoach and freight wagon were to the economy of this part of the country well into the third and fourth decades of the 1800's.

### Early Schools

AS EARLY as 1650 the General Court of Connecticut established a code of laws which ordered that every township within its jurisdiction comprising as many as fifty householders, should appoint a schoolmaster to teach the children to read and write. Thus, the school and the church took root together, and sprang up almost with the first log cabins in the forest. Although a school of sorts had evidently existed previously, the first allusion to schools in the town records of Wallingford was in 1678. At that time they voted "to allow for the encouragement of such a school master as the select men shall approve of, ten pounds a year in general, and three pence a week for all scholars, from six to sixteen, as long as they shall go to school." Apparently, a room was hired for this purpose, because it was not until 1702 that the town voted to build a schoolhouse. By 1722 it became necessary to have several schools, and so appeared the beginning of school districts.

In the earliest days there was no mention of any subject but reading, writing, and spelling. It is quite probable that for a long time nothing else was taught except occasionally the rudiments of arithmetic. The books used in the schools were limited, both in number and scope. The *New England Primer*, the *Psalter*, Dilworth's *Spelling Book*, and Dilworth's *Schoolmaster's Assistant* for arithmetic were the only ones in use. The teaching of manners and respect for elders, particularly the dignitaries, was greatly stressed. And once a month the minister catechised the children in the meeting house, accompanying that catechism with many a stern reproof.

The first schoolhouse in Meriden was a little low, red hut with four small windows, which stood at first near Ann Street, but was later moved to the slope between Gale Avenue and Holt Hill bridge. Another one, just as red and just as small, was built a few years after on the "old road," now Colony Street. Each one had a fireplace "for the alternate freezing and roasting process which the scholars underwent during the cold weather." Here

the children learned the alphabet and were taught to call "Z" "izzard." The Primer for the younger pupils, and the New Testament for the older were the school reading books in the seventeen seventies. The first edition of this primer was strictly religious in its axioms. Thus: "In Adam's fall we sinned all." The woodcut was of an apple tree, beneath which were two figures having a remote likeness to humanity, one of them offering the other a big apple.

Even as early as 1773 the town records show that Meriden was separated into school districts, because the taxes for school purposes were then divided proportionately between the districts. And by 1820 several schoolhouses had been built. In the western part of town there was a particularly substantial one, known as the Stone Schoolhouse. The uptown section had grown so populous by 1832 that there was difficulty in deciding the location of the Center School, and the question was settled by dividing the area into the north and south centers. The south center acquired for its school a small workshop at the northwest corner of the Broad Street Cemetery, on a lane which is now Charles Street. The North Center School was at a junction of Broad and Wall Streets. In 1835 a district was set off at the Corner, and a school was opened in a tiny building which stood just where the Main Street railroad crossing now is. This school was moved a few years later into the Lyceum building which was built on what is now Church Street.

Our frequently quoted Mrs. Breckenridge attended the North Center School during the winter of 1834. Here is her description of it: "The dimensions were probably twenty by twenty-five feet. A large butternut tree grew at the northwest corner of the building. Beneath this tree was the wood pile of logs to be cut for fuel as wanted. This was by no means as often as needed for warmth and comfort. Before the two doors, which gave entrance to the house, lay flat stones, which served as door steps. The doors gave access to two lobbies, where four or five children could stand at once if they stood close. In the lobbies or entries, as we called them, were kept the outer garments, the dinner pails and other possessions of the scholars. In the middle of the room a raised hearth or platform, about three feet square, made of brick and the thickness of a brick in height, supported a box stove. The room had four windows, two on a side. Around



the room on three sides was a sloping counter which served as a desk, on which were kept, in more or less orderly fashion, the books and slates of the larger scholars. In front of this counter, on three sides, was a bench made of slabs, the flat side being uppermost. In front of these were low seats, with an apology for a back. On these the younger scholars and the very little ones were seated. The windows were shadeless; neither blind nor curtain tempered the glare. They were never washed, unless in summer some young woman teacher . . . essayed, with the help of the girls, a little housekeeping on her own account. The room was swept once a week by the girls in turn.

"Oftener than not three dollars a week for a man teacher and one dollar and a half for a woman, for six days' teaching, was thought 'pretty easy.' An acceptable candidate for the winter school must be able to teach reading, writing (for this he must 'set copies') and Daboll's arithmetic, so far as or including the rule of three; to make a quill pen, and to 'govern' the large boys.

"At nine in the morning those who loitered outside were called in by a vigorous thumping on the window sash with a ruler or ferule. This instrument was utilized as a timekeeper, to line copy books, and as a means of castigation whenever energetic disciplinary measures were in order. The pupils rushed in with all the racket and clatter that vigorous youth, shod in heavy cowhide boots and shoes, are capable of creating. The boys who entered later perpetrated a curious side-long jerk of the head, and the girls a perpendicular dip of the person, both contortions being supposed to indicate 'manners.' When fairly seated, Testaments were produced and school opened by the first and second classes reading two verses as it came the turn of each scholar.

"The reading over, all the large scholars turned their faces to the wall and addressed themselves to Daboll's arithmetic, Woodbridge's geography or their home-made writing books. Of course, the boys could turn on the long benches easily, but the girls had to take pains to perform the gymnastic feat properly. It was done by stooping and placing the hands on each side of the skirts, then by a quick, circular movement throwing the feet over the bench. This was usually done simultaneously. When called upon for anything by the teacher the whole class whirled back again.

"Webster's *New Speller* was the class book for spelling in the school. The third class having had their spelling lesson in words of two syllables set for them to study, the little ones were called up one by one to be taught their 'A, B, C's' . . . . It would now be time for the second class to read and spell. A whirl of feet and petticoats landed two rows of boys and girls standing on the floor facing the teacher, who gave the order, 'Manners!' and the jerking of necks and bobbing of skirts gave evidence that school etiquette was understood. The spelling came first, afterward the reading from the same page, such things as:

'We burn oil in tin and glass lamps.'

'We can burn fish oil in lamps.'

A geography lesson, if anybody had one, mending pens, attending to sums and a playtime for the boys and one for the girls brought the morning session to a close.

"The afternoon began by reading in the *Columbian Orator*. The *National Preceptor* came into use a few years later. To some of the scholars this was the best part of the day. More Daboll, a geography lesson, and more alphabet for the little ones. Poor little things! They sat patiently three hours on the hard benches, with nothing to do and nothing to look at. The one virtue required of them was to keep still. More spelling by the first and second classes, and at one o'clock the school day's work was done. 'Manners' were required from each scholar on leaving the room, and the genuflection was aimed at the wall, the benches, the door or the teacher as it happened."

During this same period Meriden could boast of several private schools. The first one in town was taught by an Episcopal clergyman, the Reverend Mr. Keeler. In 1834 Miss Julianne Eddy opened a private school in the basement of the Center Congregational Church. At that time it was only one large, cold, gloomy room, filled with benches. The next year the school was moved into the basement of the old Baptist Church on the northeast corner of the cemetery, because the room here was lighter and warmer. Some years later, after Miss Eddy's marriage, Miss Henrietta Malone started a private school in Captain Collins' old house on East Main Street near the corner of Parker Avenue. And in 1840 John D. Post established the "Academy," a boarding school in a small way, on East Main at Elm. For a time this school had a fair patronage from other towns, although there were well-

established boarding schools for young ladies in Hartford and New Haven, and Cheshire Academy enjoyed considerable prestige.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### Meriden in the Wars

THE TERRIBLE Pequot War was over before any settlement of white men took place in the Meriden area. By the time King Phillip's War was under way, Meriden was still a part of Wallingford. The entire community set up regular guard service with a tight schedule for sentinels on duty throughout the dangerous period. There was an elaborate system for alarms, not like our present plans to warn of an atomic attack, but at least equally adequate for the times.

As has been said, the Indians in this neighborhood were friendly to the white man and as afraid of warring tribes as any settler worried for the fate of his family and property. But there was no telling when enemy propaganda might win over a neighbor Indian here and there. Those Indians knew the white man's property as well as the settler did himself. They had the run of the farms and were potentially too dangerous, in the event they should become renegades, for the peace of the white settler's mind.

In the Joseph Wadsworth papers discovered around 1900 in an old pine box in the attic of the Wadsworth home in Hartford, that man credited with hiding the Charter in Hartford's famous oak tree says of King Philip's War that "fortunately Connecticut was not called upon to make any sacrifices in this troublous time, as aside from the burning of Simsbury there was no property lost in the colony and I always believed that it would not have happened if the people had remained in their homes instead of rushing off. . . ."

However, many Connecticut men did "rush off." Of the 300 Connecticut Englishmen in the army of 1,000 raised for the Narragansett campaign, there were a few from this section. Some served in the disastrous Swamp Fort fight in Rhode Island. Some years later land was given to the veterans in recognition of military service. One of these was Samuel Hough, father of James who built the Meriden mill later known as Baldwin's in the north-eastern section. His land in lieu of a pension or the more modern

"GI benefits" was in the Norwich section of Connecticut where he lived at the time of his enlistment.

Only one Meriden man is listed as being in the Louisburg expedition in 1745. He is Samuel Royce, son of Captain Ezekial who is recorded as having made a death claim after his son died in New London upon his return from Cape Breton. Quite a few Meriden-Wallingford names are on the rolls of the French and Indian Wars as participating in the Fort Ticonderoga campaign, — names familiar in our history such as Daniel Hough, Benjamin Curtis, Abraham Hall, Moses Curtis, Isaac Cook, Jr., and Benj. Rexford.

Before recounting Meriden's part in the Revolution, the small part played in the War of 1812 by local people can be quickly told. This was not at all a popular cause in any part of New England. Trade was too important to the inhabitants tasting the early success of their manufacturing and merchandising talents. The embargo on the port of Boston was a serious setback. Nevertheless a number of Meriden men enlisted for military service although there is no indication that they were ever actively engaged against the enemy. Their duty was apparently guard work in New Haven or New London, and even that was of short duration.

The colonists' ties with England, which had been stretched taut for some years, reached the breaking point in 1775. The news of Paul Revere's ride, the night of April 18, and of the following day's fighting at Lexington and Concord spread like wildfire throughout the colonies. Patriots hesitated no longer and eager men hurried towards Boston. One company of 38 men, under Captain John Couch, went from Meriden. These men were out only seven days, hardly time to go to Boston and return. They doubtless received notice while on the march that their services were not needed. One Samuel Kilbourn rendered an account "for ferrying across Connecticut River at Hartford in the Lexington alarm Capt. Couch, of Meriden, with 18 men, 4 hourses and 1 waggon. Also Capt. Cook of Wallingford."

Captain John Couch, probably Meriden's outstanding Revolutionary War hero, had come here in 1746 and bought a farm from Aaron Lyman. He was, therefore, not a young man at the outbreak of hostilities. He built his house on what is now the junction of Wall and North Wall Streets. The Ransom Baldwin



place (1828) was once part of Captain Couch's farm.

Shortly after the Lexington alarm the Legislature issued the first call for troops. The regiment was recruited in New Haven county, and about September 28, 1775, it marched to the Northern Department and took part in operations along Lakes George and Champlain. In this campaign Captain Isaac Cook, of Wallingford, commanded a company in which there were about ten Meriden men, including Lieut. John Hough and Sergt. Samuel Hall.

In the expedition to Lakes George and Champlain, referred to above, many of the soldiers were taken sick and the following bills were paid by the state for medical attendance to Meriden men. Dr. Insign Hough presented a bill for going after Benjamin Austin to Stillwater, N. Y., on October 30, 1775:

To Horse hire 130 miles at 2d per mile	£1-1-8
To my time 8 days at 3/8 per Day	£1-4-0
To cash paid expenses on said Journey	18-5

Simeon Perkins presented a bill for bringing home his apprentice, Jared Benham, from beyond Albany.

Lieut. Joseph Shailer was taken sick at Putney, Vermont, after the campaign and "was tended 16 days" at an expense of £1-10-0 and then was obliged to hire a man and a horse to bring him home, a distance of 190 miles, at an expense of £6-16-18.

John Austin, of Wallingford, presented a bill for going for his sick son, Amos, six miles this side of Albany.

A soldier on his way home from the campaign was taken sick at Edward Collins' home, on North Colony Street, in Meriden, and could go no farther, so there he remained helpless for six weeks, with Dr. Insign Hough and Dr. Isaac Hall attending him, and Mr. Collins furnishing nurses and watchers. The quantity of rum and brandy administered to this sick man was prodigious during the two weeks when he was "worst." He finally recovered and went on his way, but his name is not given in the bill.

In the siege of Boston, which took place after the Battle of Bunker Hill, the only official record of service from Meriden is that of Captain John Couch. He was in Colonel Wadsworth's regiment which reached there towards the end of January, 1776. Probably there were with him several more Meriden men he had commanded during the Lexington alarm, but the names of only two have come down to us — Ezekiel Rice and Samuel Scovil. Letters from Ezekiel Rice, Joseph Rice and Joseph Shailer (or



Shaylor), written while they were soldiers in the Revolution, are quoted in Curtis's *A Century of Meriden*.

This Joseph Shailer served continuously in the army from the beginning to the end of the war and attained the rank of first lieutenant. He was in the battles of Long Island, White Plains, and took part in the storming and capturing of Stony Point under "Mad" Anthony Wayne, on July 15, 1779. His home was on Gravel Street, a little south of Baldwin Avenue. He later moved to Ohio.

After the British evacuated Boston, General Washington and his army set out for New York. Captain Couch was at that time in Col. Bradley's battalion in General Wadsworth's brigade which "was stationed the greater part of the summer and early fall of 1776 at Bergen Heights and Paulus Hook (now Jersey City). In October it moved up the river to the vicinity of Fort Lee, then under General Greene's command. In November most of the regiment was sent across the river to assist in defending Fort Washington, which on the fall of the fort November 16, was captured with the entire garrison." Captain Couch was taken prisoner, together with the following Meriden men in his company: Gideon Ives, John Pierce, Samuel Rice, Jonathan Hall, Benjamin Austin, Gideon Rice, Stephen Atwater, Moses Hall, and possibly Nathaniel Yale.

Captain John Couch was in a British prison on Long Island for some time after this capture. In the State Library at Hartford, in Revolutionary War Documents, Vol. XII, are preserved various receipts for money conveyed by the state to men in prison on Long Island, 1777. John Couch's name is among the number of those signing. He evidently gained his freedom during the year, for he appears as captain of a company in a militia regiment ordered to Peekskill in 1777.

Isaac Hall Jr., son of Dr. Isaac Hall, was apparently captain of a company of militia which was, in 1776, attached to a regiment of Light Horse. In 1777 he was in service in New York and "parts adjacent," and in 1779 it is recorded that some men were detached from "Capt. Isaac Hall's company to go to Greenwich." His name also appears on the roll of those doing service in the British invasion of New Haven in 1779.

Divan Berry was second lieutenant of a company in Wadsworth's brigade, and was at Fort Washington, but it does not

appear that he was captured. Later that same year he was at Ticonderoga under General Gates. In 1779 he was a captain on coast guard duty near Greenwich, during the time of the British expedition up the Sound under General Tryon. In 1780 he was a captain in the 17th regiment.

John Hough, mentioned before as a lieutenant in Captain Cook's company in 1775, did service in this state during the years 1776 and 1777. In 1779 he was captain of a company which served in the Tryon invasion, and in 1780 he was a captain in the Seventh militia regiment. In the month of October, 1777, Lieut. Colonel Baldwin's regiment of militia was ordered to the Hudson at Fishkill to aid the Continental army. They were out perhaps 30 days, and probably saw no active service. In this regiment, besides this same Lieut. John Hough, were Captain Bezaleel Ives and Captain Dan Collins.

Two Meriden slaves served in the Revolution. One was Chatham Freeman, who undoubtedly assumed this surname when he became free. He was the slave of Noah Yale, and the story is that he was offered his freedom if he would go to war in place of one of Mr. Yale's sons. Chatham served the enlistment, returned home and was freed. The second slave was Black Boss who belonged to Abel Curtis. On a report of the town of Wallingford 1779 in the State Library, appears the name of Boston negro, next to the name of Chatham negro.

As the first enthusiasm of the war wore away it was found necessary to make an inducement for men to join the army. Accordingly, on March 31, 1777, it was "voted, that the town will give a Bounty to those that engage in the Continental service. Voted that each soldier that engages in the Continental service for the quota of Wallingford shall be paid by the town the sum of five pounds lawful money by the year for three years unless sooner Discharged: to be paid by the beginning of each year."

This payment of bounty was carefully recorded, and in April, 1779, the town reported to the State War Department a list of all those to whom bounties had been paid. A second report was made in December, 1779 and at various times lists were furnished of those soldiers whose families were assisted by the town during their absence in the field.

Several references have been made to the British expedition up the Sound, under General Tryon. This is probably as close as the



war came to Meriden, since New Haven is nearer than Danbury. The enemy came to anchor in New Haven harbor about midnight on Sunday, July 4, 1779. No doubt beacon fires and scurrying horsemen soon carried the news through the surrounding country, and probably by daybreak of the fifth, the various militia companies in this and adjoining parts of the state were on the march to New Haven.

The British troops, about 3,000 strong, were landed at daybreak on the east and west shores, and New Haven was soon in possession of the enemy. Several buildings were fired, a number of people were killed, and numerous outrages were committed. On the East Haven side there were many encounters with the local militia and sharp fighting a good part of the day. The swiftly gathering companies from up the state soon convinced the British that their position was untenable and on the evening of the sixth they embarked and set sail for New York, stopping on the way at Fairfield and Norwalk, where they committed greater devastation and havoc than at New Haven.

Two companies of militia from Meriden marched to New Haven, probably starting on the morning of July 5th. One was under the command of Captain Dan Collins and the other under Captain John Hough.

No doubt other Meriden men saw service in the Continental army, but their names in the official records can not be positively identified as belonging to men from this vicinity. The lack of a middle name, an almost universal custom at the time, and the failure to give in the records the addresses of the great majority of the soldiers, makes it generally unwise to assume an address.

Today in the Curtis Memorial Library hangs a large bronze plaque containing the following inscription and names:



MERIDEN IN THE WARS

IN MEMORY OF THE SOLDIERS OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1775-1783

— PARISH OF MERIDEN —

ERECTED BY THE SUSAN CARRINGTON CLARKE CHAPTER  
DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

JUNE 1906

Capt. John Couch	Nathaniel Douglas	Isaac Rice
Capt. Divan Berry	Chatham Freeman	Gideon Rice
Capt. Israel Johnson	Phineas Hough	Wait Rice
Capt. Isaac Hall	Moses Hall	Justus Rice
Lieut. Joseph Shailer	Jonathan Hall	Jotham Rice
Sergt. Samuel Hall	David Hall	Solomon Rice
Sergt. Ezekiel Rich	Isaac Hall, Jr.	Joseph Rice
Stephen Atwater	Benjamin Hart	Levi Robinson
Abner Andrews	Gideon Ives	Benjamin Rexford, Sr.
Isaac Atwater	Isaac Livingston	Benjamin Rexford, Jr.
Benjamin Austin	Phineas Lyman	Thomas Spencer
Jared Benham	Asaph Merriam	Nash Yale
Samuel Collins	Ephriam Merriam	Nathaniel Yale
Ebenezer Cowles	Boston Negro	Waitstill Yale
Joel Cowles	John Pierce	Nathaniel Yale
Joel Hall	Israel Hall	Jotham Hall
Rufus Hall		

MILITIA

Capt. Dan Collins	Jesse Merriam	Phineas Hall
Lieut. James Hough	William Merriam	Enos Hall
Ens. Brenton Hall	Joseph Merriam	Marshall Merriam
Sergt. Amos Ives	Titus Merriam	Amasa Merriam
Corp. Daniel Janes	Caleb Merriam	Samuel Merriam
Corp. Ezra Rice	Stephen Perkins	Elisha Merriam
Sanborn Ford	Elisha Scovil	Caleb Merriam
Yale Bishop	Capt. John Hough	Daniel Mekye
John Barnes	Lieut. Nathaniel Merriam	Wyllys Mekye
John Couch	Ens. Thomas Foster	John Morgan
James Cabon	Sergt. Joseph Edwards	Simeon Perkins
Abel Curtis	Sergt. Jonathan Yale	John Robinson
Timothy Foster	Sergt. Comfort Butler	Samuel Rice
Daniel Hall	Sergt. Giles Griswold	Elijah Scovil
Moses Hall, Jr.	Willys Bishop	David Scovil
Bezaliael Ives	Asa Brown	Moses Way
Timothy Ives	Edward Collins	John Yale
Samuel Johnson	Elisha Curtis	Abner Way
Benjamin Merriam	Giles Foster	Amerton Yale
John Ives	Ozias Foster	Jesse Merriam
John Miles	Jeremiah Farrington	Daniel Yale

Many of these Revolutionary soldiers are buried in the old cemetery on Broad Street. Here in 1931, a boulder with a bronze tablet listing their names, was erected by the Captain John Couch Branch, Sons of the American Revolution.

# Old Customs, Old Ways and Progress

PERHAPS IT would be interesting to consider what life was like in these old homes a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago. Since Meriden was an isolated farming community — a suburb, really, of Wallingford — most of the homes were of the simple farmhouse type. Inside, as we have seen, there were often pleasing details, such as good paneling and attractive bannisters and cupboards. But the clapboards were nailed directly to the studding and, in the early houses, boards were used instead of plaster on the inside of the outside walls. In winter how the wind and cold must have whistled through the cracks! Blazing fires were kept burning in great fireplaces, but rooms were still draughty and cold. The bedrooms must have been almost unbearable. No wonder warming pans and feather beds were considered necessities.

Merely keeping alive was, in many respects, quite a difficult matter. Besides the hazards of Indians and wild animals, there was a great lack of medical knowledge, and physicians of any kind were few. The mortality rate was much higher then than now, particularly among young mothers. In reading over old records, it is very noticeable that many men had two, three, and sometimes even four wives.

A woman was almost an economic necessity for a man, in those days, when she was not only his companion and the mother of his children, but when it was she, alone and unaided by any outside help or any mechanical gadgets, who kept his house clean, prepared every morsel of food he ate, and made every stitch he wore. Nearly every household had its great wheel for spinning wool and its small, or flax, wheel for making linen thread; plus a loom for weaving this thread into sheets, table linen, and cloth for underwear for the entire family. The wool, also, had to be woven into material, out of which the wife made suits for her husband and clothes for herself and the children.

There were, in addition, socks to be knit from the carded wool. Until about 1810 nearly all materials for common wear were



homemade. Besides all this, the housewife had to make her own pillows, feather beds, soap, and candles. Candle making was a serious affair. At first they were made by "dipping," then tin moulds came into use and a number of candles could be poured at one time. Even so, candles were used with the greatest economy. In the realm of food, the lady of the house, of course, churned butter, made cheese, baked bread, dried and salted food for the winter, and helped with the butchering, the chickens, and the vegetable garden. The old adage, "Women's work is never done," was certainly true then.

The settlers in this area must have found an abundance of game, but as early as 1760 there was a colonial law forbidding the killing of deer from the first of January to the first of August. The penalty was four pounds for every offense. Several times, in old inventories, wild pigeon nets were mentioned. This indicates that people took advantage of the great annual flights of these birds, no doubt for food and to use the feathers for beds and pillows.

Every family lived on the produce of its farm or by the proceeds of some useful trade, which was secondary to the work of tilling the soil. Among the various families there was little difference in the value of their possessions. There was no great wealth anywhere. Mr. Perkins speaks of the almost complete lack of money or circulating medium. In 1706 the entire circulating cash in gold and silver in the colony was only about 2,000 pounds. And, of course, there were no banks in existence. Bartering produce was the accepted method of doing business.

Life was hard, in those early days, and pleasures were few. Even though the all-day church attendance seems severe to us, it provided a welcome change from the drudgery and monotony of the rest of the week. And the "nooning," particularly in summer, when it took on the air of a solemn and sedate picnic, gave the women almost their only opportunity to get together.

In fact, the church, with its attendant ceremonies, provided most of the social life known at that time. There were the dinners and balls at the ordination of the minister, and the feasts, as at Thanksgiving (Christmas then did not count at all) and at weddings and funerals. At this time relatives and friends came from afar, and were expected to stay and partake of the funeral baked meats which custom required must be lavishly provided.

Outside of this feasting, the funerals were dreary, indeed. The



coffins, outlining as nearly as possible the shape of the body, were made by the nearest carpenter. Sometimes they were clumsily lined, but usually not; occasionally they were stained or painted a crude blue color, but most often the wood was left untouched. The term "bearers" was a literal one, because the coffin, with its burden was carried on men's shoulders the entire way to the roughly dug grave. Not a flower was ever used; it would have seemed indecorous to try to lighten the gloom of death.

A quaint custom which has been lost with the years is described by Mrs. Breckenridge: "The very greatest and most important of all social functions was the ordination dinner and the ordination ball that followed. Both for the dinner and ball a liberal supply of liquors was supposed needful and proper. The last ordination ball given in Meriden was in 1803 when the Rev. Erastus Ripley was ordained. This ball was given in the old tavern ball-room. The last real ordination dinner was given when the Rev. Charles Hinsdale was installed in 1823. This dinner was at his own house situated on Broad Street. At this feast onions held an honorable and conspicuous place, and liquors were so copiously provided that it was whispered a prominent member of society became quite incoherent in conversation. . . . Ordination balls were very serious and stately divertisements, and very rigid and formal etiquette was observed; also, critical attention was given to the dancing steps."

Naturally, these grand affairs did not happen often, and there was very little entertainment, as we think of it, in the lives of early Meridenites. There was scarcely even any reading material available to them. The Bible, of course, was read and reread, partly perhaps because of the scarcity of other books. The few printing presses in the colony printed sermons of eminent preachers. These were widely circulated and read. One of these was a sermon of the Rev. Theophilus Hall, delivered on August 10, 1760, entitled, "A Saving Faith Scripturally Explained." The annual almanac was a popular publication, since it provided reading for the entire family and served, besides, as a farmer's log book and weather predictor.

There were few children's books, other than the *New England Primer*. But by 1796 Meriden had a small subscription library of 153 volumes, mostly relating to divinity and theology. It is





The Meriden City Hall





Broad Street in 1889

First Baptist and Center Congregational Churches at left; Central Tavern in background. Brick building on corner beyond churches is Coe Block razed in the 1890's





Broad Street in 1956  
World War I Monument and Memorial Boulevard, looking south past the historic white churches





Theophilus Hall house, later the Central Tavern





Andrews Homestead, 424 West Main Street  
Built circa 1760



Interior Andrews Homestead  
Meriden Historical Society hostesses in 18th century costumes





Meriden Center about 1834  
 looking north from junction of Curtis and Broad Streets  
 (From Barber's Historical Collections of Connecticut)



Curtis Street elms, as they were



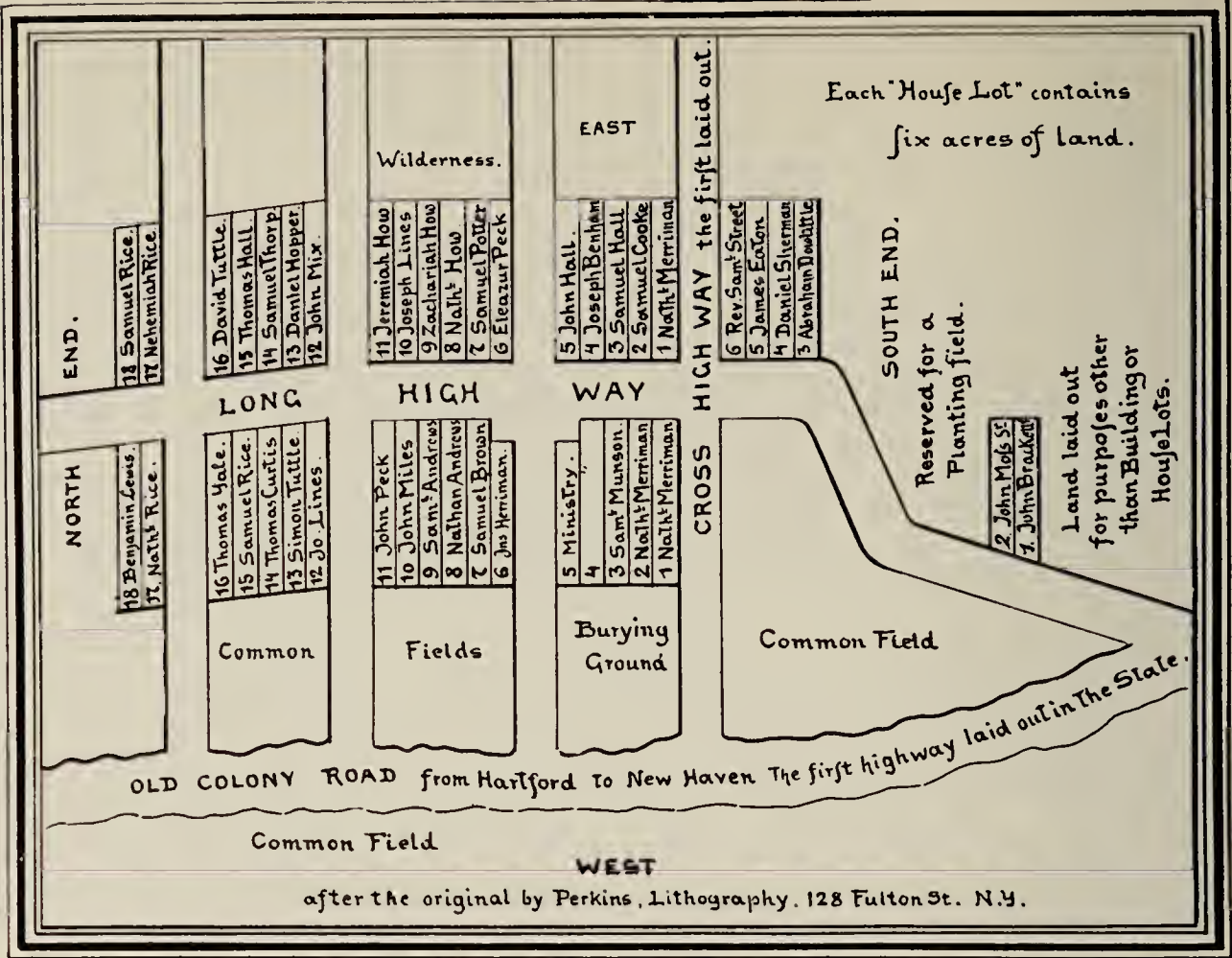


1711 Club Inn  
677 North Colony Street, built 1711

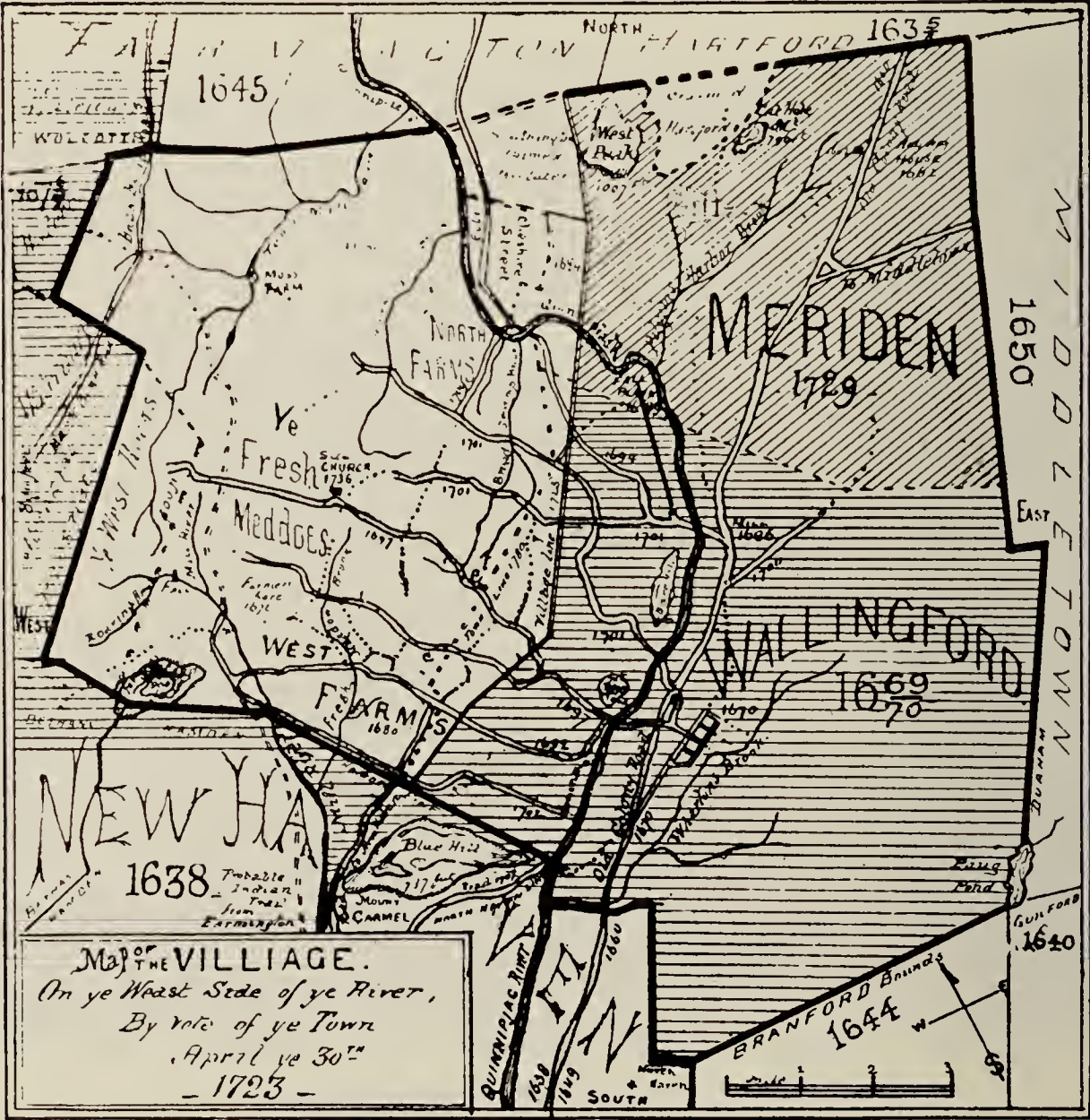


Residence Dr. Sherburne Campbell  
1074 East Main Street, built before 1772





Original plan of the Town of Wallingford



Map prepared by Joseph P. Beach of Cheshire



likely that this collection was housed in the basement of the old meeting house where the Center Church now stands. In the early part of the nineteenth century the only private libraries of any size were owned by Dr. Isaac Hough and Mr. Fenner Bush. Among the doctor's collection were the works of such English authors as Smollet, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Dean Swift and Fanny Burney. *The American Lady's Preceptor*, published in Baltimore in 1821, was another favorite of the doctor's niece, Mrs. Breckenridge, who says that he and Mr. Bush bought all the new books as they came out.

In that far-off day, people in this little parish had no idea what was happening in the outside world until long after it had occurred. There was no newspaper, letters were extremely rare, and news was brought only by travelers going through, perhaps from Hartford or Boston to New Haven or even to Wallingford for, in the early days, it was considered one of the large towns in the colony.

That our town was not a place given to luxury may be assumed from descriptions of living conditions in Perkins' *Historical Sketches*. Mr. Perkins stated that in 1802 there was but one carpet in all of Meriden. According to Mrs. Breckenridge, carpeted parlors were common by 1836, but she questioned if there were a dozen homes in town at that time where carpets were in use in the living room.

We have come to think of these early settlers as exceedingly strict and righteous, but apparently they, too, had their small vices. In 1647 the colony ordered that no person under twenty years of age should use any tobacco without a certificate from a physician; and no others although addicted to its use, unless they were ten miles from any house, and then not more than once a day. Cider was the common beverage of the country, although some beer was drunk. Among some old records this strange entry was found, "It is ordered that there shall be one good hogshead of beer for the captain and minister."

In early times rum was largely consumed. A half pint was given, as a matter of course, to every day laborer, especially in summer. In all families, rich or poor, it was offered to male visitors as a sign of hospitality, or just plain good manners. Women had their nip in the form of "Hopkins Elixir," which, at the same time, probably promised to cure everything. Crying babies were

silenced with hot toddy because it was supposed to be good for colic. Every man imbibed his morning dram, and this was considered temperance. There is a story of a preacher who thus lectured his parish, "I say nothing, my beloved brethren, against taking a little bitters before breakfast, especially if you are used to it. What I contend against is this dramming, dramming, dramming at all hours of the day." Tavern haunting, especially in winter when there was little to do, was common, even among respectable farmers. A story is told of one man who frequently went to the old Central Tavern to meet some cronies. Late one cold winter night he said goodbye to his friends, wended his way home, and tucked himself snugly in bed before he remembered his patient nag left tied in the tavern shed more than a mile away.

Now and then in records or recollections of the days when Meriden was in its infancy there is a reference to a "house painted red." The inference is that Meriden, like the run of old New England communities, was made up of houses unpainted for the most part, whose shingles were allowed to mellow with the weather. When paint was used, it was generally either bright red or equally bright yellow. Even the meeting houses usually glowed with the favorite red paint which was retained throughout succeeding years as a favorite barn shade. The fashion for white paint which is now so much a part of New England tradition, didn't come in until the second or third decade of the nineteenth century.

A description in Mrs. Breckenridge's *Recollections* of the old Hough house so famous as a tavern is applicable on a smaller scale to the plan of houses in general use at the time. The front door opened into a square hall from which a narrow crooked stair rose to the second floor. On either side of the hall, doors opened into flanking rooms, each with its fireplace. From each of these rooms doors gave access to the big kitchen, the actual center of family life, its huge fireplace and brick ovens in constant use.

The family ate in the kitchen, spent their evenings there reading, sewing, spinning, or knitting, commonly received their visitors there. In some homes the kitchen also doubled as sleeping quarters for a part of the brood growing too numerous for bedrooms. Low ceilings were far more common than the high ones such as wealthier home owners affected. The furnishings were quite simple — usually a few straight-backed chairs primly lined



against the wall, a dresser covered with an array of pewter and whatever lusterware the housewife could collect, a small table, a stand or two for candles, and a high-backed settee, maybe two, beside the fireplace.

During the earliest days in Meriden, houses were provided with strong barricades for doors and windows as protection from marauding Indians. The Belcher Tavern was an example of the sturdy defense system necessary to the times. After the community grew and the Indian menace was being forgotten, less protection was needed. Door latches were first wooden and later iron. The earliest ones had no thumb pieces. The latch was on the inside of the door to which a cord was attached and run through to the outside by way of a hole bored for the purpose. Locking the door was simply accomplished by pulling the string inside.

Some houses were built with a wide front door made of two separated panels swinging in from each side. Such a doorway remains in the old Johnson house on Eaton Avenue now owned by Carter H. White. The simple handleless latch was no protection for such a double door. Locking, in such cases, was accomplished by a stout wooden bar, longer than the width of the door frame, carefully fitted into equally stout wooden arms attached midway on the door casing, a device still in the old Johnson house.

Ornamental trees on private property were neglected for many years after the first settlement. Landowners were too busy wresting a living from the stony land, which was actually a blessing in disguise since to it may be credited the developing of the creative, inventive genius of future Meridenites. But it was the custom from the beginning of road building to plant lines of trees to flank the highway. Lombardy poplars had a brief vogue, probably a bit of French influence, the last specimen of which was a scraggly tall skeleton near Hough's tavern felled in the 1890's. But poplars were never as popular as the stately elm so much better suited to giving shade and graceful ornamentation.

Orchards were an early acquisition in the neighborhood. Fruit trees never objected to their stony surroundings. Many barrels of apples were stowed away in Meriden cellars. But more found their way into presses of the cider mills. As early as 1718 there is a record of official permission to one man to erect a cider mill.

Before Meriden became a separate town, cider mills were dotted all around the community.

Creaking machinery could be heard throughout the apple season as it squeezed the presses that drew sweet liquid from fleshy pulp. No doubt Meriden boys used to congregate around the tubs elbowing one another out of the way as each tried to get his sucking-straw into the golden juice. Full barrels of cider were carted home. Many families had cider on the table at every meal. Sweet-apple cider was also boiled down to make "apple-molasses" much desired in pies and puddings and sauces. Incidentally tea was a beverage used only for special company. Coffee, home ground of course, and sweetened with molasses, was far more commonly used.

Just as "Yankee" became a synonym for ingeniousness, thrift, and careful bargaining, — as has been said a Yankee "is a born arguer, a born peddler, a Jack-at-all-trades and good at them all," — so is "Yankee housewife" a synonym for scrupulous cleanliness. Indoors in Meriden, neatness was the supreme rule. Perhaps with the advent of wallpaper and carpets and a great variety of furniture and knickknacks, the neatness which was the well-earned repute of the New England housewife took a bit of a backward step. But cleanliness was always solidly next to godliness. Mrs. Breckenridge gives a delightful description of the hustle and bustle of seasonal housecleanings by which the early Meriden housewife purged her house in almost the same fervor that found its outlet in a spiritual revival.

When the settlers first moved into what is now Meriden there was little fencing done. Pasture lands were more or less common property during the days before threat from Indians was entirely laid at rest and while wild animals were making their periodic depredations on domestic breeds. Men found it safer to make a joint project of protecting herds and flocks. It was from this period that "Milking Yard" got the name that is still used for a tract partially included in Walnut Grove property today. It was out there a pen was built into which cows were driven at milking time where owners came to milk, each his own cows.

Cattle were branded but strays from other areas now and then found their way into Milking Yard, and others were too carelessly marked for proper identification. One of the earliest requests for the separation of Meriden into a village with its own



governmental system was based on the need for a more conveniently located "Pound" for caring for such strays. Driving cattle to Wallingford was far too irksome for the busy men of this neighborhood.

Gradually the wilderness was being conquered. Soon it became feasible to divide land into parcels for private use. The tinkling of bells on cows and sheep that once had sent out merry tunes in common pasturage was reduced from mass orchestration to smaller units. Fences were built. Plenty of stone was at hand on Meriden hills for the purpose. Unhappily those picturesque piles of moss-grown, vine-covered rocks are fast disappearing. But in the early 1800's they were an integral part of the landscape. In the lowlands the usual fences were made by digging a ditch. On the ridge made by the excavated dirt a low barrier of rails, stakes, and brush was put up.

Oxen did most of the heavy farm work like plowing and hauling. It was not until 1825 or later that horses took up that burden. Farmers worked from daylight to dark, from seed time to harvest. Tools were few and clumsy in the earliest days, but the very plentitude of stones put native ingenuity to work at devising new equipment, better than those of wood with rough iron edges and points — a talent that was quickly extended to the making of all sorts of handy gadgets that made the progress of Yankee peddlers welcomed throughout the countryside.

There are many jokes about the wooden nutmegs, basswood hams, and white-oak cheeses, but the Yankee peddler's knowledge of his market, care in selecting useful goods, and integrity in driving what may have been a "hard bargain," planted the seed from which American industry has made its sturdy and phenomenal growth. Some of the best seeds were planted by Meriden. Charles and Hiram Yale sent out peddlers with their tinware. The Twiss brothers marketed their Meriden-made clocks by peddlers. Pratt's ivory combs went to market with peddlers. Charles Parker got his start making and peddling household coffee-mills.

## CHAPTER TEN

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### Separation from Wallingford

NOT LONG after Meriden attained the dignity of being a parish society with a name of its own, some of the settlers began to agitate for a new step to importance and independence. Residents in the north end of the parish found it inconvenient to go to Wallingford to attend church, town, and freeman's meetings. Several petitions were sent to the General Assembly requesting permission to become a separate town, or at the least to be annexed to other towns nearer than Wallingford.

By May 1786, feeling was waxing rather high on the subject. A formal petition went to Hartford over the signatures of three appointed agents, John Couch, Sam Whiting, and Dan Collins. Citing how grievously the inhabitants were subjected to "great trouble, inconvenience & expence" in attending the "ordinary Business of the Town, Proxys, Town Meetings, &c." and upon their business at the County and Superior Courts, they asked that the parish become the town of Meriden and annexed to the County of Middlesex.

Wallingford countered by sending a special and eloquent committee to speak against the petition, which they did successfully. Again in 1794 another petition to the same effect was drawn up to be met with a counter proposal from Wallingford that it would be "highly reasonable and expedient and likely to unite the two Societies together and prevent a separation." Recognizing the "disagreeableness" suffered by the society of Meriden in attending meetings in Wallingford, it was proposed to hold one-third of the meetings in Meriden, and the rest in Wallingford.

Still the inhabitants of Meriden were determined to be set apart. Attempts in 1803 and 1804 continued to fail, but Wallingford leaders either tired of the struggle or accepted the inevitable. It was voted to choose a committee of equal numbers from each Wallingford and Meriden to confer. At last the final petition went to the General Assembly in May, 1806, showing that Meriden constituted in extent, population, and property more than one-



third of the parent town of Wallingford. Thereupon the Assembly passed the resolution that "The inhabitants living within the limits of the parish of Meriden be and they are hereby incorporated into and made a Town by the name of Meriden."

The first town meeting was held in Meriden on the third Monday in June, 1806, which was the 16th, at one o'clock, and the town officers were elected. So it was that 150 years ago Meriden joined the federation of independent communities so distinctive of Connecticut, and in the direct pattern by which our nation was consituted and has waxed in the freedom of the self-governed.

The moderator, George W. Stanley, was selected by the General Assembly. Under his chairmanship, clerk, selectmen, constables, tax collector, treasurer, surveyors of the highways, "fence viewers," pound keepers, jurors, and weight sealer were elected. That was an exciting day for Meriden.

Some of the minutes of the meeting make amusing reading today. Voted, they say, that any person may wear his hat in Town meeting "Except" when addressing the Moderator. Voted, That Geese shall not be suffered to run at large on the highways unless they are well Yoaked.

On that day it was also voted to "lay a Tax for the purpose of defraying the debts and expences to which this Town now is or may be liable." Five mills was the first tax rate.

A paper on taxation preserved in the Historical Society's collection says the list for 1826 for collections made by Asahiel Curtis shows nine persons paid over eight dollars each for both town and state tax. There were only 21 others who paid more than five dollars. Some who were influential citizens paid much less. The two smallest taxes were for a fraction of a cent, and both of them marked on the record as paid. It is interesting to note that in 1800, coaches were assessed at \$168, chariots at \$134, phaetons at \$75, curricles at \$68, other four-wheel carriages on springs at \$30, each gold watch at \$34, other watches at \$10, steel and brass wheel clocks at \$20, clocks with wood wheels at \$7.

According to the same paper, dwelling houses back in 1702 were put on the books at \$5 for each fireplace. Sheep that were sheared got a reduction on the list of 75 cents. There was a poll tax on citizens from 18 to 21 at \$30, from 21 to 70 at \$60.

As George Munson Curtis said in his historical address for

Meriden's Centennial celebration, "There was little about the town in its early days which indicated that some day it would grow to a place of considerable size; it was simply a quiet, peaceful community, bent on getting a living as best it could from the rather sterile soil. . . ." It was still primarily a farming community when it attained its position as a separate town.

There were a few business places begun by citizens who were looking for something other than an agricultural pursuit. The agriculture of Connecticut which had so recently fed Washington's armies in Massachusetts and New York during the Revolution, was already of too little profit to satisfy the ambitious without sufficient love of the soil to compensate for its limited productivity and remuneration therefrom. Some were beginning to branch into other lines, to take what Judge Simeon Baldwin called "a spot of earth . . . rough hills, far from the sea, with no streams to furnish any considerable power, and by their inventive faculty, their quick eye and ready hand, their wise economy, their watch of markets and creation of markets. . . ." turn this community into a place of diversified industry whose products have a world-wide market.

But in 1806 Meriden still looked very much the farm community it was. Life revolved more or less around the tavern up on the East Main Street hill at the corner of Broad. It was in that tavern kept by Dr. Insign Hough that the town officers and selectmen had their headquarters. It was there, also, that the farmers gathered to talk over the news of the day and to discuss and argue community affairs. Moreover the tavern offered an opportunity for Meriden farmers to meet outsiders and to sample opinions from other parts of the country, because it was the popular stopping place for stagecoaches enroute from Hartford to New Haven or bound the other way from New York to Boston.

Mrs. Breckenridge in her *Recollections of a New England Town* says also that the stages brought glimpses of city fashions as the passengers stopped at the famous "Hough's Tavern," the "Halfway House," to dine or sleep. So we can imagine that the tavern was a center of interest for Meriden women as well as the men burdened with the vote and hence obliged to keep up on the news.

Most of the houses built in Meriden in the years immediately



before and after the year it became a town are of modest construction and lacking some of the elegant touches in woodwork or appointment of those that came before and later. It seems obvious that Meriden was a bit on the "poor" side in that particular era — poor at least in what could be gleaned from the land, but rich in possibilities. Little shops began to spring up, places where one or two men working together were making things they could sell. George Curtis says that by 1820, 105 of the little more than 1,200 inhabitants were engaged in some sort of manufacturing. By the end of another two decades the proportion had increased to 21 per cent. Shops were larger; goods were durable, handsome, and useful; Meriden was making a name for herself in the commercial world.

These were the sort of men to whom Meriden must be thankful for fashioning the shape which is our city's today. Back in 1849 Reverend George W. Perkins pays his tribute to the breed of men who founded Meriden, and their succeeding generations who built the community: "... those fathers of ours were men, Christian men, New England men."

There is a pertinent comment in one of the historical papers written by Leland Ives to set down the history of his own family. He prefaces his factual genealogical account with the dry remark that in writing the Ives family history he was "by no means embarrassed with a superfluity of interesting material. A succession of generations of most reputable New Englanders whose quiet lives were devoted largely to farming and mercantile pursuits, is not well calculated to inspire a stirring essay."

In this present generation we can take exception to that judgment. It is so obvious now that the character of this city, which has been called an "ideal community," was shaped by the persistent efforts of the many "reputable New Englanders" who were not spectacular in their own day, but who left behind them a spectacular record. George W. Perkins in his history calls attention to a reply the Connecticut Legislature made in 1680 to a questionnaire from the mother country. "The country is a mountainous country, full of rocks, swamps and hills; and most that is fit for plantations is taken up," was what was in the report. Yet the whole state contained only about 10,000 inhabitants then. The men of "quiet lives", who were devoted to farming and their children and who used their ingenuity to manufacture

desirable goods which could be made without an abundance of water power, wrested a good living and built the foundation for a happy life for succeeding generations out of meager resources.

In another of the papers prepared for the early historical society, Henry Dryhurst reports that "when in 1806 Meriden was set apart from Wallingford, Amos White was named by President Jefferson as the first postmaster. The office was located in a one-story building . . . on the southeast corner of Broad and East Main (this was the Eli Birdsey property). He was followed by Patrick Lewis who served until President Jackson appointed Levi Yale who served the next 12 years, transferring his office to 641 Broad. The West Meriden post office was established in about 1845 with Joel H. Guy appointed as postmaster by President Polk," — the office on West Main.

The center of town life was up around the white churches on the top of East Main Street hill. Welcome Benham, whose paper for the historical society has already been quoted, recalls in 1894 his own memory of the downtown part of Meriden as being "a bog swamp extending from Colony Street on the west to beyond Veteran on the east and southerly to South Colony Bridge and northerly up to or beyond Cedar Street."

H. S. Wilcox writes in his paper for the historical collection that for a period of over 125 years after the Boston merchant Andrew Belcher built his old stone fort there is no record of any merchant doing business in this place and "probably the early settlers bought their supplies in Wallingford and Middletown."

Mr. Wilcox notes: "In the year 1792 John Butler started the boot and shoe business on South Market Street (now Broad) nearly opposite the Center Congregational Church. . . . A few years later Amos White had a grocery and provision store situated a little south of the old Meriden bank. Mr. White was the first town clerk of Meriden. . . . Eli C. Birdsey had a dry goods store on the corner of East Main and South Market Streets, occupying the front portion of the brick building now standing there (paper dated in 1893) and Alanson Birdsey occupied the rear part with a stock of groceries."

The *Century of Meriden* notes there was a store run by Amasa Curtis and Isaac Lewis in the former's house which stood at the fork of Broad and Curtis. Across the street and a bit to



the north was Seth D. Plum's tavern. There was also a big barn just east of the Central Tavern where the stagecoach horses were kept. With the many residences in the area, this was Meriden's busy center of activity. Another "center" was growing down the hill near Harbor Brook, where Perkins' Blacksmith Shop appears on the map of that era and houses were scattered along the way up old Liberty Street hill past Cowles' stone-cutting yard and toward a tannery still further to the northeast. But the hilltop was the nucleus of the new town of Meriden.

Another of the same 1894 collection of historical papers that fails to bear the name of its writer says: "Just what the state of religion was in Meriden at the beginning of this century we don't know, but soon after the Revolutionary War and during the hard times and the unsettled state of the country following that period, we have every reason to think it was at a low ebb. For 74 years there seems to be no record of a revival of religion in this town." This anonymous writer refers with admiration to the "great and wonderful reviving" that had occurred under Jonathan Edwards in 1735. Also he expressed himself as being deeply impressed by the revivals of 1852-53 under the same Perkins who wrote our charming old history of Meriden.

It is Mr. Perkins who has something to say about that gap in Meriden's spiritual growth. "So far as the morals of the town are concerned," he writes, "there are some rather curious facts. The number of taverns was astonishingly great. In 1790, and for some time before, when the whole population of the town was not more than nine hundred, and as late as 1812, there were five if not eight taverns within the limits of Meriden. As those taverns always kept ardent spirits, and as the population of the town was small, and as the amount of travel then was much less than it is now (1849) these facts indicate a low state of morals." He continues by contrasting his own era with the old, pointing out that but two taverns served Meriden in his day, a Meriden with a population of 3000, and at only one of those "are spiritous liquors sold."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### Meriden Mines

MERIDEN ONCE had its era of seeking hidden wealth in the ground. Soon after the town was settled, people began to think of what riches might lie hidden in the rocks of our hills. As early as 1712 the legislature passed a law for the protection and encouragement of potential miners in this area and in Simsbury. Shafts were sunk in Meriden and some vigorous prospecting done, but by whom nobody now knows. In 1737 a company was formed to try again in the abandoned works located in "milking-yard hill."

Papers carefully copied by G. W. Perkins in his *Historical Sketches* indicate the search was for gold as well as for copper. He further relates that men who were "old inhabitants" in his time said that in their boyhood it was a matter of current belief that gold had actually been found here. The story also went that the "foreigners" working the mine appropriated and kept for themselves what gold was found. Anyway the means for smelting ore was not at hand. One attempt to ship ore to England for smelting resulted in disaster when the ship was lost at sea. Once more the mine was abandoned, never to be tried again.

This was called the Golden Parlor Mine. Several records of contracts for work were preserved into Mr. Perkins' time. They indicated that what was then a very considerable sum of money was expended on a futile search. The Golden Parlor in the Walnut Grove section was not the only such venture. Land south of the Belcher property amounting to some 50 acres was leased in 1735 "for digging all manners of metals." A good century and a half after that ended as an unprofitable operation, Meridenites frequently found fragments of good crystal quartz in the old pits — some recollect discovering bits of "lovely blue quartz."

Still another try for buried treasure was made near the Hanging Hills by Dan Johnson who is reported to have lost a small fortune. His shafts were in what was then called Mining Hill — what is now the island at the south end of Merimere, since waters were backed up around it for our reservoir.

It may seem incongruous to us in this day and age to find our



canny forebears had what seems to us a pipe dream. But copper was successfully mined in Granby and iron in Salisbury. In fact the Salisbury mine and works were well known. The guns of the Constitution and other early American warships were cast at Salisbury out of iron mined there. Gold, silver, mica, lead, asbestos, copper, and cobalt have been found not too far from Meriden. None of it was ever in amounts that would fire a miner's imagination today. Sandstone such as was used to make the old turnpike milestones went from this neighborhood to build some of the lush structures of New York's earlier days. The one profitable product from Meriden's rocky surface is the trap rock, which has given being to substantial businesses for many years and with that we are content. Meriden's prosperity stems from the minds and skills of the men and women who call it "Home."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

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### Slavery

IN COLONIAL days Connecticut and New Haven colonialists thought it was as proper to buy, sell, or keep slaves as to do the same with cattle, horses, or chickens. There are records of public auctions of slaves in Middletown. Slavery began in Connecticut in 1639 when one colored lad from Dutch Guiana was held as a slave in Hartford. Many of the Pequot Indians captured in the war with that enemy tribe were held as slaves. But Indians made unwilling workers so the practice was discontinued, although there was no hesitancy on the part of Connecticut people about selling Indians who were captives into slavery in the West Indies.

But one of the first anti-slavery societies in the nation was formed in New Haven in 1833, evidence that people in this area were not backward in their awakening to the wrongs of the practice. In Meriden the abolitionist movement was sparked by a small group of "men of property and influence." Believing that slavery was a "monstrous sin," they sought to convince other Meridenites by bringing in a famous anti-slavery minister to speak at the Congregational church.

There was also a strong and bitter anti-abolitionist feeling here and the leaders on that side of the controversy determined to break up the meeting. There ensued what is known as the "Meriden Riot" when two brothers named Thompson, imports to the community for the occasion, battered down the church door with a log picked up in a neighboring woodpile. Eggs, rotten and otherwise, and some stones were used as missiles. Women fainted, there were many scuffles, and much excitement. But apparently nobody was seriously hurt. It was, however, a *cause celebre* in Connecticut, almost resulted in the summary dismissal of the minister, and took many years to heal breaches caused in local friendships.

An interesting postscript to this "Meriden Riot" incident is that one of the Thompson brothers is said to have seen a local young lady in church with whom he fell instantly in love. Against her family's wishes and the advice of friends, she finally married him



— we assume after he served the six months' jail sentence imposed for his part in the riot. Needless to say the couple left Meriden for some unidentified place "in the West."

The slavery controversy boiled in Meriden for a long time. Mrs. Breckenridge in her *Recollections* tells about the persecution of two of Meriden's early manufacturers — Harlowe Isbell and Homer Curtis who owned a shop for making door latches. These two men were at the time the only local persons voting the anti-slavery ticket. Twice their factory was set on fire and burned down with all contents. Many word-of-mouth anecdotes have been handed down through the years about the part these men took in helping escaping slaves on their "underground" route to freedom.

The root of the trouble in Meriden lay in disruption of trade with the South. By the time of the outbreak of the Civil War few if any slaves remained in what could be called a state of bondage in this neighborhood. No Meridenite was to suffer loss of personal property, valuable assets, by the freeing of slaves. But Meriden's very existence depended upon continuing employment of craftsmen and laborers in the variety of businesses finding ever wider markets. Sudden disruption of trade with the South, a ready market for some of Meriden's finest quality products, hit where it hurt. When the inevitable came to pass, many a family faced some extremely lean years before a subsequent readjustment restored trade which was, and still is, Meriden's life-blood. The shortages normal in war times were many times compounded by unemployment. It was very natural that the moral issue of slavery was confused in local minds by intrusion of serious dislocation in budding industries.

Actual slavery in Meriden itself was of too small an extent to make it a great local issue. Meriden was stirred in the controversy by theoretical and religious conviction mainly. Perkins in his history says only a few slaves were owned here. But their condition, living as they did singly in the families of their owners and working side-by-side with them, was very different from that of slaves worked in gangs under overseers as was done in the South. Meriden slaves were considered members of the family and baptized as such on the plan of "household baptism."

Mr. Perkins lists many records showing such baptisms and the no less carefully recorded deaths. From 1728 to 1766 he says

29 deaths out of 316 were so worded as to indicate they were slaves. He also notes that slave trade as such never existed in Meriden although there were some transfers of slaves made in the same manner as transfers of other personal property.

Emancipation by proclamation made little difference in Meriden. Some of the local slaves had already been freed before the great national decision was taken. Others were living in the promise of early release and with the knowledge their children would not be born into slavery. There was not a hitch in the transition to the enlightened era for which the Civil War was fought that was caused by slaves themselves, or by owners reluctant to change their status. There were, however, honest differences of opinion among Meriden's rugged individualists about the issues that culminated in the bloody, heart-breaking war. These left scars as deep if not as notorious as that made by the "Meriden Riot."



# The Railroad, Past and Present

WHEN THE first "iron horse" snorted into Meriden on December 3, 1838, the stagecoach horses in the stable on Broad Street may have pricked their ears and trembled with fright as the strange sounds of its coming drifted up the hill. But the trainload of dignitaries, pulled by a primitive locomotive, which arrived to mark the opening of the new railroad, marked also the beginning of the end of stagecoach days here. The horses were soon to be retired from the business of hauling travelers between New Haven and Hartford, and the mechanical steed was to take over this task permanently.

No single factor has played a larger part in shaping the pattern of Meriden's growth than the course taken by the railroad through the low lands at the valley's deepest depression, where Harbor Brook flows sluggishly on its way to join the Quinnipiac River. The tracks were laid over a swamp, and there was quicksand under the rails where they crossed East Main Street, a condition which was to cause much trouble to maintenance crews in later years. But an early proposal to run the line east of Broad Street, then the center of the town, was strongly opposed, and the thinly settled section of West Meriden was chosen. The westward trend of the town's expansion was thus established.

The railroad was incorporated by the State Legislature in 1833, when Andrew Jackson was still President. But the project did not come to life until several years later. The interval was filled with the loud complaints of those who saw their means of livelihood threatened by the proposed line: tavern keepers, holders of toll gate privileges, the center and fringes of the stagecoach enterprise, including its many stockholders.

Two Meriden men, both large property owners in West Meriden, were influential in backing the plan to run the railroad through that section. They were Major Elisha A. Cowles and Judge James S. Brooks, who sold part of their holdings to help the railroad establish its right of way. With an eye for future possibilities, they had assisted in pushing the bill of incorporation

through the State Legislature, and were well prepared for the later moves.

Judge Brooks was an especially interesting figure. At the age of 12, he had been bound out to a tavern keeper in Haddam, but ran away after he had been threatened with a beating. He trudged the 25 miles to Meriden with all his belongings wrapped in a bandana, and his sister, who lived here, took him in. For a time, he worked on a farm in Westfield. He spent his spare hours studying and finally was admitted to the Connecticut Bar. Gradually, he accumulated considerable property, and his farm, through which the railroad was to run, was known as one of the finest in Meriden. In selling land for the right of way, he made an astute move, for, as business began to develop in West Meriden, he was able to subdivide his property into business and residential streets. Today, many of Meriden's business blocks stand on the original farm site. The First Congregational Church is located on land once owned by him, and the factories and business blocks on State Street are also placed on the Brooks farm lands. Brooks Street took its name from the judge. Until her death in 1949, his granddaughter, Miss Sarah Collins, lived in a little brown house, filled with heirlooms, at the side of the tracks. This property has gone the way of other old landmarks, so many of which were effaced as business advanced. An old cow barn stood for years on Miss Collins' property, converted into a garage. A viaduct was incorporated into the deed to the railroad company so that the judge's cows could be driven under the tracks to their pastures. The judge, when selling his land, insisted on a provision that all passenger trains stop in Meriden, and this proviso has been brought forward at times when the railroad was considering curtailing the number of station stops for express trains.

Rockney's *History of New Haven County* states that the first depot was in Rogers Hotel from 1840 to 1842, when it was moved across the street to the rear of Conklin's Hotel beside the railroad track, where the "Railroad Refectory" contained the ticket office and a waiting room for passengers. A paper prepared by Allen B. Squire, when paymaster of the New Haven Railroad, contradicts this version. Addressing the original Meriden Historical Society in 1894, Mr. Squire stated that the first passenger station in Meriden was on what is now Railroad Avenue, and was in connection with Capt. Conklin's Hotel, which fronted on Main



Street. This building, he reported, was destroyed by fire, and the station waiting room was temporarily located in the northeast corner of the building which stood at the corner of East Main and South Colony Streets. Major Cowles and Dr. Isaac Hough owned the land and the building, which was later remodeled into a hotel run by Hervey Rogers. In its later history, it was known as the Rogers Block and contained Connors' Segar Store and a shoe-shining establishment, until it was torn down to permit the widening of the corner which is now the beginning of the Loop.

In November 1842, Nelson Merriam and H. M. Foster issued a poster bearing the picture of the hotel which then occupied the corner of East Main Street and Railroad Avenue, part of the land on which the present Cherniack Building stands. It showed the "Railroad Refectory" protruding beyond the rear of an engine, with the freight station opposite, where the present railroad platform is located.

The poster announced "respectfully" to "friends and the public generally" that this "new and spacious establishment, eligibly located at the Depot of the Hartford and New Haven Railroad, is now open for the reception of Company." It boasted that "the House has been furnished throughout with New Furniture, and every arrangement has been made for the comfort and convenience of guests." Particular attention, it stated, "will be devoted to Parties of Pleasure," and boasted that a "Refectory is connected, where a variety of Refreshments are prepared for the accommodation of PASSENGERS BY THE CARS." The advertisement was signed by N. Merriam and H. M. Foster, proprietors.

Like Judge Brooks, Major Cowles was a prosperous local businessman who could look into the future and see visions of even greater prosperity. The two men had engaged in a joint transaction some years before the railroad route was planned. They had bought seven acres, including the site of the present Derecktor Building at the corner of West Main and Colony Streets. In 1831, they conveyed to the town a strip of land 20 feet wide on the west side of Colony Street as far as the present Wilcox Block to widen the street from a narrow road to its present width. Both became directors of the new railroad, and Judge Brooks was acting president in 1856 and signed the annual report in 1859. Eli Butler was a director in 1868 and in 1909 John

L. Billard was a director. After the lease of the Boston and Maine Railroad, Charles F. Linsley and Mr. Billard were directors of that railroad. All these connections of local men with railroad enterprise arose from the spadework done by the Cowles-Brooks combination of interests in the early period.

South of Main Street, the railroad traversed the land it had purchased from Major Cowles. North of Main Street, it ran over property bought from Judge Brooks. Major Cowles, one of the incorporators, served as a director for a number of years.

The line between New Haven and Meriden was the first link in this section of the New York, New Haven & Hartford railroad system. For a year after this link was completed, stagecoaches carried the passengers on to Hartford. Eventually the Hartford & New Haven, as it was called, combined with the later-built Hartford and Springfield, and finally with the New York & New Haven to form the New York, New Haven & Hartford. The New York end was completed in 1849.

In 1847, Judge Brooks was elected president of the Springfield, Hartford and New Haven Railroad, which had its southern terminus at Belle Dock, New Haven, where connections were made with New York and other places by steamboat until train service to New York was established.

But in the Meriden of 1838 these possibilities were only guessed. The tracks ran here and stopped, and business began to gather in that neighborhood.

A tavern was not the ideal location for a station, although it did offer accommodation to travelers in the way of quick refreshments. Dr. Hough and the Major could compete with the Central Tavern uptown on rather favorable terms, for the trains could hold more passengers than the stagecoaches, but the stages ran more frequently than the trains at the beginning of this new era.

The railroad at the start was a great novelty. The puffing locomotive seemed like a great monster from another world. People were awed by its appearance and the clamor of its coming. Horses plunged and reared as they came near the crossing. John Ives, who was to become a prosperous dry-goods merchant when he grew up, often told the story of the day when he first heard the steam engine whistle. He was then a boy on a farm in the southeast district. The whistle blew as the train came through Holt's Hill cut, and John ran home in fright to tell his mother



that some great beast was making terrible sounds in the woods.

But it didn't take long for the feeling of strangeness to wear away, as the business possibilities in connection with the railroad's location were recognized.

Meanwhile, the railroad was making some progress in its own operations. The income for the first three months was \$15,500, which dropped to \$8,000 during the next three months when the Connecticut River was open. During the first summer, receipts were \$8,500, giving a gross income of \$32,000 for the first nine months.

The road had four locomotives, valued at \$18,000 for the lot. Five four-wheel freight cars were valued at \$1,500.

In the summer of 1845, T rails were substituted for the old iron bars on the southern part of the line. During 1843, a little more than \$1,000 was expended in Meriden for station and depot improvements. In 1846, the fare was reduced from a little more than four cents to three cents a mile.

In 1850, a branch track from Berlin to Middletown was placed in operation. In the same year, double track was laid from Meriden to Berlin. A second track was laid on the southern portion of the road about 1852, and in 1854 double tracking of the whole main line was completed.

The business center of Meriden was to be well started toward its present development before the railroad was to have a station of its own. In 1854, the railroad bought from William Hale for \$3,000 a tract of land then known as the Hale "garden plot." It faced Colony Street and extended through to the railroad tracks. On this land, the present site of the Colony Building, a brick station was erected which was to be used for 28 years. The place was later known as Winthrop Square.

Surrounding the station was an open plaza, where large elm trees flourished on the Colony Street frontage. Majestic elms lined Colony Street at that period, and remained undisturbed for many years. They survived the leisurely horse-and-buggy era, and were removed only when they were recognized as an obstacle to the curbside parking of automobiles in front of Colony Street stores.

But parking was no problem in the nineteenth century, and the railroad plaza was not congested with traffic. Merriam's hackstand near the station drew its patronage from the trains. It was the

forerunner of the taxicab companies which compete for business near the present station.

In 1864, fire destroyed most of the buildings on the east side of Colony Street, and the station was badly damaged. It was repaired and continued in use for 19 more years.

When a new passenger station was built in Wallingford in 1878, Meriden was envious. Agitation was begun for a new station here, and the railroad decided to meet the local demands. In 1865, a new freight station had been erected on State Street extension, and the site occupied by the old freight station, across the tracks from the old passenger station, was chosen as the site for new passenger facilities.

The new station was much larger than the station which now serves Meriden. It had a mansard roof and cupola, two almost inevitable details of the florid architectural style of the period. Along the side nearest to the tracks ran a long platform covered with a canopy upheld by iron struts. The interior was poorly lighted and the general effect was depressing, especially so after the building was allowed to run down in the course of the years. But in the seventies, when all was new, the station was regarded as one of the finest on the line.

The Winthrop Hotel was built not long after the big station was opened to the public. A private way between the depot and Colony Street was established along the southerly border of the tract on which the old station stood, and the public was quick to take advantage of the short cut. The narrow passage provided a convenient route between the station and the hotel. The hotel porters trucked trunks and baggage over it for many years. This sort of traffic has ceased, but the passage is still used by many pedestrians, and any hint that it might be closed has always aroused a storm of protest.

As the years passed, pride in the station declined. More than 20 years ago, sentiment began to gather for a new station better suited to Meriden's needs. The old station was too large for the volume of passenger traffic served, railroad officials admitted. It was also dingy and unattractive in all respects, and all too little attention was devoted to keeping it clean.

Eventually, local efforts to induce the railroad to build a new station were successful. The present brick building, a much more compact structure, was erected in 1942, and formally opened on



September 21 of that year. It contained all the necessary facilities, including an attractive waiting room. Combined with it is a comfort station, built at city expense, and operated by the city for the convenience of the public. A small building for the Railway Express agency was built at the north end of the railroad area.

Considerable thought was devoted to improving this area to provide easy access to the station while interfering as little as possible with the flow of traffic on State Street. A wide sweep of concrete-paved driveway leads to the side of the building on the east, and there is room here for the Hartford, New Haven, and Middletown buses to take on and discharge passengers when connecting with trains. A division separates this driveway from State Street, giving a place for one taxi stand. Another taxicab company is allowed to use space along the platform south of the station. On the north side of the building is a railroad parking area, where short-time parking is permitted. But the great increase in traffic in the last ten years has produced new problems in connection with the station's location, and the proposal to relocate it, which arose in 1955, was an attempt to solve them.

If the plan had gone through as outlined, the present freight station on State Street Extension would have been converted into a passenger station. The International Silver Company offered to purchase from the railroad the site of the passenger station and the adjacent land bordering its own property. Part of the land thus acquired was to be re-sold to the city for an off-street parking area. The Public Utilities Commission refused to approve this transaction, believing that the new passenger facilities to be provided would be inferior to the existing facilities. Its action appears to have put a period to the negotiations.

Such problems as these were more than a century away from the struggling railroad of the 1840's. They were still undreamed of when the railroad attained a virtual monopoly on transportation here at the close of the Civil War. But there were other problems just as serious.

The railroad had given a new aspect to Meriden. It had fostered the growth which was to result in the incorporation of the city in 1867. But the growing pains were acute, and some of them, local industrialists and businessmen believed, were due to the highhanded way in which the railroad was being managed.

## THE SHORT LINES

The first attempt to break the railroad monopoly came in 1869, when a special town meeting appointed a committee to seek passage through the Legislature of a bill to authorize the town to subscribe \$100,000 to the capital stock of a proposed Meriden and Cheshire Railroad. A little later, the town of Cheshire authorized a subscription to the same enterprise.

At that time, the only independent north and south railroad was the New Haven and Northampton Railroad, the Canal line, and it was probable that the proposed line was to connect with it and thus form a new route to New York, which would provide competition and lower rates. But the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad acquired control of the Canal line, and the scheme for the Meriden and Cheshire Railroad was effectually blocked.

The local manufacturers were still determined to find some way of beating railroad rates, which they considered discriminatory. The cost of bringing in coal and heavy supplies was a heavy burden on manufacturing. A proposal was advanced to build a railroad from Meriden to the Connecticut River at Cromwell, there to connect with boat and barge service on the river to New York and ports along the Atlantic coast. The announcement of this plan in 1881 triggered immediate and unexpected results. The Consolidated, as the New Haven Road was then known, reduced freight rates to Meriden by 25 per cent. Local businessmen were warned that this was just a trick, and that the advantages might be only temporary. Sentiment for a competitive railroad continued strong, and one of Meriden's foremost industrialists did all that he could to encourage it.

This man was Horace C. Wilcox, pioneer and leader in the rapidly growing silver industry. The original capitalization of the proposed road was set at \$300,000 of which \$230,000 was pledged before the first organization meeting. Mr. Wilcox declared himself ready to take any remaining stock, but he hoped that the stock could be spread throughout the business community. About 150 citizens of the Meriden area attended the initial meeting July 5, 1882, when 17 directors were elected, who, a few days later, elected Mr. Wilcox as the president of the line.

The air was full of optimism. One newspaper comment was:



"It is fair to hope that the sound of the locomotive whistle will be heard on the road before the snow flies." This was the summer of 1884, when the route of the new line was being mapped.

The railroad was actually built during the following eight months, with terminal facilities established in Cromwell. At this end of the line, there was some dispute over the terminus site, but it was finally decided to place the passenger and freight station and the yards between Camp and Center Streets, the site now occupied by the New Departure Division of General Motors. The right of way skirted Brookside Park, then called Camp's Meadow, and the south edge of Pratt's Pond. The road purchased 40 freight cars, one passenger coach, and one light engine, planning to buy a heavy engine later.

On April 1, 1885 the State Railroad Commission made a trip over the line and pronounced it fit for service. On April 6, service actually began. The timetable gave the trains 35 minutes to make the run to Cromwell, with flag stops at Highland, Smith's crossing and Westfield. There were three round trips daily, timed to connect with the Hartford-New York boats on the Connecticut River. If shippers got their freight to the Meriden station by 5 p.m. it would be delivered in New York the next morning.

The Meriden and Cromwell line also tried to foster passenger traffic by advertising excursions to New York via the Hartford and New York steamboats. Such excursions were popular in the eighties, and the down-river runs attracted large crowds. One favorite run was via the steamer "Sunshine" to Sag Harbor, Shelter Island, and Niantic. There was also a "circular" trip, by way of Cromwell, the river run, and back by boat to New Haven, leaving New York at 3 p.m., and reaching Meriden by the "steamboat train" at 9 p.m. This gave a day in New York and consumed a little more than 24 hours.

The initial success of the Meriden and Cromwell line, which was able to show a small profit after nine months of operation, produced many proposals for extensions to New Britain, Plainville, Wallingford, and even New Haven, as well as to Bristol, Waterbury, and Middletown.

"The one with the most steam behind it," according to Glover A. Snow whose exhaustive article on the subject of early railroads in this vicinity was published in the August 1953 issue of *Transportation*, was "a projected extension to Waterbury."

In Waterbury, this proposal led to citizens' meetings, stock-selling efforts, and a bid for legislative approval of consolidation of the Meriden and Cromwell with the projected Meriden and Waterbury railroad. It was pointed out that the Consolidated freight rates were actually higher than they had been before the announced 25 per cent reduction in 1881. And they had practically been frozen at high levels by the original Interstate Commerce Commission Act of 1887. But, when it came to picking up a share of the check for the new line, Waterbury citizens held back. The road was financed with great difficulty, and Meriden had to take a much larger part of the investment than originally contemplated.

The new line took off from the Meriden and Cromwell tracks east of Twiss Pond in Meriden, went under Britannia and Broad Streets, passed over North Colony Road just north of the old city line, bridged the tracks of the New Haven, then turned southwest and crossed numerous streets. Iron bridges were used at North Colony Street, the crossing over the Consolidated, and at Gracey, Kensington, and Lewis Avenues. Beyond Lewis Avenue, the tracks were almost at street grade, but overpasses were erected at street crossings. Land was purchased north of West Main Street for a passenger station, yards, engine house, shops, and turntable.

The most difficult feat of construction was in laying the tracks from West Cheshire to Summit, a distance of three miles, with an elevation reaching 549 feet.

Before the line could be completed, Horace C. Wilcox had to rescue the financing by pouring into it much additional capital of his own. He and other Meriden men dominated the enterprise, although Charles Dickenson of Waterbury was elected president. There were many squabbles over the right of way between the new railroad and property holders along the route.

After numerous delays, one of them occasioned by the famous blizzard of 1888, the Waterbury line was finally completed in the spring of that year. On May 24, 1888, the Meriden and Cromwell and the Meriden and Waterbury were consolidated as the Meriden, Waterbury and Connecticut River Railroad Company. Horace C. Wilcox was elected president of the combined lines. Among the directors were Abiram Chamberlain, later governor of Connecticut, and George R. Curtis, both of Meriden.



The road earned seven per cent for its investors the first six months it was in operation. A large volume of freight traffic barged up the river to Cromwell was carried over the new line. But the next six months told a different story. In March 1889 the directors authorized an issue of \$400,000 in second mortgage bonds to obtain more capital. The expense of operating the Meriden-Waterbury part of the line had proved much heavier than was expected. Horace C. Wilcox again found the needed funds.

The waiting room and ticket office at the West Main Street station were opened June 17, 1889. But for passengers it was a crude type of railroading. If a car went off the track, a rather frequent type of accident, the people aboard had to get off and walk or catch a ride in a horse-drawn vehicle. There were no telephones with which to summon aid.

After the death of Horace C. Wilcox, August 26, 1890, the road was without its strongest source of support. The Wilcox estate held \$176,000 and the Meriden Britannia Company, of which he was president, \$100,000 of the total capital invested, or \$276,000 of the \$375,000 in stock which represented the investment of Meriden stockholders. The road was mortgaged for \$1,000,000.

The subsequent chapters in the line's history told a sad story. In 1892, a syndicate headed by New York and Boston financiers with large railroad interests obtained control, but several Meriden men, including Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Curtis remained on the board. The New York, New Haven & Hartford and the New York & New England railroads were both suspected of having a hand in the deal, but the Consolidated spokesmen said they didn't want it. Later, it was discovered that the New York & New England had obtained a lease, but its validity had to be tested in the courts. Somehow the road struggled along, but the New York & New England went into bankruptcy and its assets were sold. As a result, the New Haven obtained control, and all the special rates for which Meriden had fought were abrogated. The purpose of the line had been defeated.

For two years, operations ceased, and the line was threatened with the loss of its charter. This brought action, and a new corporation was formed in 1898 under the name of the Middletown, Meriden & Waterbury Railroad Company. Ownership was

in the hands of "friends of the New Haven Railroad," which really controlled the line. The section between Westfield and Cromwell was abandoned. Trains were run into Middletown from Westfield over the Middletown-Berlin branch of the New Haven instead of going into Cromwell. The first train from Meriden to Waterbury went over the line on December 5, 1898. Mixed trains of freight and passengers were run, and there was considerable traffic.

From 1902 on, the line was operated under direct lease by the New Haven. By 1906, much of it had been electrified, and high-speed cars were used. Instead of running to the West Main Street station, a connection was made at Brookside Park with the city trolley tracks on Pratt Street, and the New Haven Road's Meriden station was the terminus for the Middletown interurban cars. The Meriden to Middletown service was operated by the Connecticut Company, the street railway subsidiary. The Meriden to Waterbury part of the road had not been electrified with the rest of it, and service was cut on that line until it finally went out of operation on June 24, 1917.

Meriden to Middletown hourly service was continued until 1927, when buses took over. But trolley service ran as far as Westfield until 1932.

Most of the roadbed of the old line, which furnished so many picturesque incidents in the history of Meriden transportation, is now covered over with trees, bushes, and weeds. Hikers still tramp along parts of the right of way, but only the old-timers among the walkers realize that they are passing along the route of an ambitious venture, which had its high moments, but flopped when the demand which brought it into being finally ceased.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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### Industry of the 19th Century

"SUCH is the surface of our town, so much of it covered with rocky and barren ridges, or with swamps unfit for tillage, that if we had remained exclusively an agricultural town, our population would not have increased, probably for the last thirty years, and our pecuniary circumstances would have been equally cramped. . . . one who was acquainted with this place 35 years ago, wearing every appearance of stagnation and dilapidation, must, with high gratification, contrast that decay with the life, thrift and taste now so characteristic of Meriden."

So wrote G. W. Perkins, historian of early Meriden in 1849, when the industrial life of the community was in first bloom.

Whether or not the poverty of the land was the main incentive, it is certain that the trend of occupations was away from agriculture and toward manufacturing in the 1820's and the 1830's, and that industry had been established as the chief source of livelihood here by 1845. In that year, the records of the time showed that 640 Meriden men, out of a population of about 3,200, were engaged in manufacturing. The town had grown by more than 1,000 residents in the previous 20 years, but growth was much more rapid after that, and the growth of industry was the principal reason.

The early stages of manufacturing here began with the application of waterpower to turn the wheels of crude machinery for finishing goods. The plants were scattered along the reaches of Harbor Brook, from near its sources in the eastern part of the town to where it joined the Quinnipiac. In 1825, these little establishments included a carding and filling mill for processing wool brought from surrounding towns, placed nearly where the brook crosses the Middletown road; the sawmill of Asahel Baldwin near the Westfield road, and a grist mill close at hand; the ivory comb factory of Howard Pratt & Co. near the New Haven and Hartford turnpike; the door latch factory of Isbell & Curtis about two miles farther downstream; and a sawmill at the crossing of the old Hanover Road, the last on Harbor Brook

before it joined the Quinnipiac. Sodom Brook had no industries.

Another tributary of the Quinnipiac was the little stream of Crow Hollow which gave power to the brass works of Lauren Merriam and the ivory comb works of Walter Webb & Co. Near the Cheshire border, the power of the stream was utilized by Henry Griswold for the manufacture of bone buttons. At Hanover, the abundant water power turned the wheels of the factory of Brooks & Tibbals, who made augers. Half a mile below was the plant of Sanford Parmelee & Co., manufacturing augers and skates.

The factories just enumerated comprised the whole list of Meriden plants in 1830 that were operated by auxiliary power, except the tannery works of John Butler at the corner of Liberty and Broad Streets, and the pewter works of Ashbil Griswold at his residence on Griswold Street, each of which used a horse attached to a sort of merry-go-round to move light machinery.

In addition to the products of these factories were the products turned out in little shops which were family affairs. The Curtis family especially was noted for its production of pewter table-ware. Nearly every Curtis, man and boy, acquired skill at this trade. Several larger shops produced tinware, including Patrick Clark & Sons of Clarksville, Goodrich & Rutty, south of the center, and Noah Pomeroy on the east side. This was the type of goods marketed by the peddlars with their wagons. These family businesses laid the foundation for the great industry which was to give Meriden the name of the Silver City.

But Meriden was not a silver town in 1840. Its chief industry at that time was the manufacture of ivory combs, with tinware a close second. The tinware apprentices worked 12 hours daily for about 75 cents, and their wages were considered high.

Julius Pratt & Company, successor to Howard Pratt & Co., became the leader in the comb industry. To this plant the great elephant tusks, weighing from 60 to 80 pounds apiece, were brought to be processed into combs in about 20 operations. Blanks were fed to automatic machines which stamped out the combs complete. In the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C., is a solid ivory cane with gold mountings made by Julius Pratt & Co. and presented by the firm to President John Quincy Adams.

The plant of Walter Webb & Co., at first in Crow Hollow and later at Hanover, was a Pratt auxiliary, with purchases and sales



for a joint account. In 1848, the Pratt factory was destroyed by fire, and the Webb plant operated night and day for more than a year to supply the demand for ivory combs, showing a profit of 100 per cent on the invested capital. The Pratt plant was rebuilt and continued in operation until profits went out of the ivory comb business due to the substitution of cheaper and eventually more satisfactory materials.

At one time, three fourths of the ivory combs made in America were turned out by the Pratt interests.

There was a constant search here during the 40's and 50's for products that would sell easily from peddlars' wagons. Carpetbags, hoop skirts, and balmorals, a kind of woollen skirt, were turned out by Jedediah Wilcox.

A peculiar article of neckwear called a "stock" was once manufactured extensively by Allen and Hezekiah Rice. It was made of silk or satin over a framework of bristles, three or four inches wide, and clasped with a buckle at the back of the neck.

Ira Twiss & Brother built a factory at the head of Prattsville Pond late in the 30's, and there turned out wooden wheels for clockworks. These clocks were distributed by peddlars who took care not to visit the same home twice, for expansion and contraction of the wooden works made the clocks erratic time-keepers. This industry declined rapidly after Chauncey Jerome of Bristol in 1835 devised machinery with dies for stamping out clock wheels, and thus furnished a springboard for the manufacture of cheap clocks that would really keep time. The Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Company here turned out brass clock wheels for a brief period about the middle of the century.

Meriden could establish a claim to priority in the manufacture of table cutlery, but the industry here was 16 years in developing. Julius Pratt & Co. had made bone handles for this type of ware, brought to the United States by two Englishmen, Evans and Longdon, in 1836. At first, production was "farmed out" to convict labor at Wethersfield Prison in an attempt to overcome the differential between the cost of American and English labor, but the effort proved a failure. Walter Webb & Co. at Hanover acquired the process, and the firm of Pratt, Ropes, Webb & Co. was formed in 1845 to turn out the product. Ten years later, the Meriden Cutlery Company was organized to continue with the line, and bone-handled table cutlery remained an important

Meriden product for a long period.

But large-scale manufacture here awaited the introduction of steam power. According to Julius Pratt, who returned to Meriden for the Centennial celebration in 1906, the first steam engine used here was installed before 1840 by Remick K. Clarke in his small tinning factory, which was destroyed by fire shortly afterward. Charles Parker, who founded the Charles Parker Company in 1832, the only manufacturing concern of that period which has survived to the present day, is credited with being the first successful user of steam power here. As late as 1847, he was still the only local user of steam to turn factory wheels.

But the practical application of steam was not the only "first" for Charles Parker. His name stood for pioneering enterprise in many fields. He was public spirited throughout his long career, and ahead of his time in the quest for civic improvement. He was one of the group which turned Meriden from a little country town into an incorporated city, and he became its first mayor.

Mr. Parker was born on June 2, 1809 in Cheshire, and was "bound out" to work on a farm. In 1828, he came to Meriden and was hired by Patrick Lewis to make coffee mills. In December 1829, he went into business for himself with a capital of \$70, taking a contract for 13 months to make coffee mills for Lewis & Holt. By 1831, he had accumulated enough capital to purchase land near Broad Street and build a shop which was finished in 1832. The original power plant of the shop was a blind horse hitched to a pole sweep, and the horse plodded hour after hour in a circle in the rear of the shop. The principal product of this small enterprise was coffee mills. In 1844, in an enlarged plant powered by steam, Mr. Parker is reported to have been the first local manufacturer to plate spoons and forks. Some holloware was also made. Another enterprise with which he was connected was the manufacture of steam engines, printing presses, and machinists' tools. In this he was jointly engaged with Oliver Snow, an ingenious mechanic.

There was also the C. and E. Parker Company which made brass and iron castings.

By 1860, the various concerns in which Mr. Parker was interested employed about 1,000 men and 100 women, with a monthly payroll of \$30,000 to \$40,000, large-scale business for those times.





Residence Frederick M. Stevens, Jr.  
304 Parker Avenue, built 1743



Residence Carter H. White  
203 Eaton Avenue, built circa 1785



# FALLS PLAIN DIVISION.

February 19<sup>TH</sup>  
16 <sup>89</sup>/<sub>90</sub>

New Haven and  
South Meriden

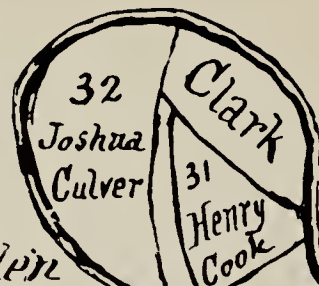
Ye North End

West  
Side

33 Samuel Roise
34 John Alwater
35 Sant Eimer Street
36 Walter Johnson
37 John Dowlittel
38 Roger Tiler
39 John Ives deceased
40 Nathaniel Roise
41 Samuel Manson
42 Joseph Dowlittel
43 Rich Luthrop Widoe
44 Mr John Brockitt Snr
45 Isaac Beach
46 William Bunatha
47 Joseph Roise
48 Eben Lewis
49 Mister Street
50 John Peck
51 Saml Dowlittel
52 Nathl John Hills
53 Saml Merriman
54 Thomas Beach
55 Saml Brockett
56 John Merriman
57 Saml Andrews Jr
58 Thomas Curtis
59 Daniel Mix
60 John Hall Snr
61 Joseph Holt
62 Sgt Abt Dowlittel Jr
63 Joseph Benham Snr

TWO RODS WIDE

HIGHWAY



32 Joshua Culver

Clark

31 Henry Cook

30 Thomas Hall  
29 Samuel Browne  
28 Samuel Cook Snr

27 Nathaniel Royce
26 John Moss
25 Joseph Benham Jr
24 Nathl Merriman Jr
23 William Cole
22 Hugh Chappel
21 Joseph Thomson
20 Eliasaph Preston
19 Eleazur Peck
18 Ebenezer Clark
17 Jeremiah How
16 Nathan Andrews Snr
15 Saml Cook Jr
14 Simon Tuttlell
13 Abram Dowlittel
12 John Moss Snr
11 Thomas Yzile
10 Benj <sup>n</sup> Holt
9 Nathl How
8 Edward Fenil
7 Samuel Street
6 Samuel Thorp
5 James Westwood
6 Enson Saml Andrews
3 Samuel Hall
2 John Hitchcock
1 John Parker

Quinnipiac River

East Side

Samuel Cooke

Brook

Thorp Munson

New Haven East River

64 John Beach  
65 David Hall

We come Southwards 80 Rods from the  
brook on this side Nathaniel Hows Meadow and  
this is a reserve in case we should want a  
lot on two pt last -

Land out of a "Hiway" two rods broad  
Two tiers of Lots - Those on the East side  
extended to the Quinnipiac River and the  
lots on the West side extended to the Hills -

Each lot contained from 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 4 acres -

Reduced from Original -





Residence Robert S. Rice  
651 Paddock Avenue, built 1796



Lucchini Homestead  
234 Coe Avenue, built before 1795





Daniel Hough, or Alfred P. Curtis Homestead



Curtis Street Horsecar





Residence Robert Berger  
164 Broad Street, built circa 1735

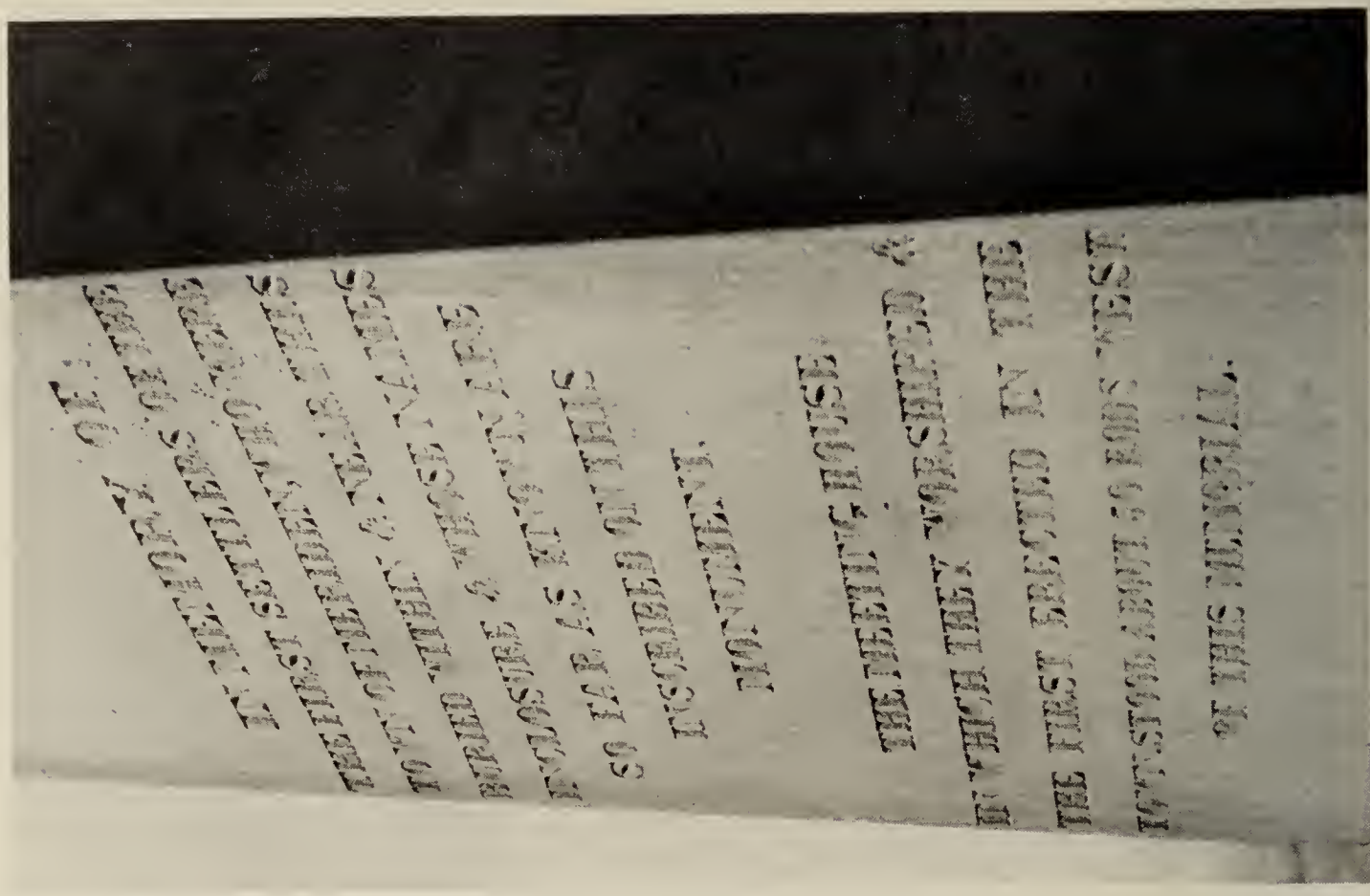


The Old "Spoon Shop"  
East Main Street, Middletown Road





Meeting House Hill Burying Ground



Inscription on Meeting House Hill Monument





The Eli Birdsey House  
Corner East Main and Broad Streets, built 1830



William H. Race Residence  
93 Curtis Street, a spoon factory in the early 19th century





East Main Street, circa 1885



To the original coffee mills of the Parker Company, a varied line had been added by the mid-century, including German silver knives, forks, and spoons, tobacco boxes, sewing birds, silver plated spectacles, vises, waffle irons, miscellaneous hardware, sewing machines, locks, and presses.

With the Civil War, the Parker Company turned to the production of military rifles for the Union armies. They manufactured the regular standard breech-loading single-shot musket used by the Northern troops, and also developed one of the first repeating military rifles, which was used by the Kentucky Militia and drew Confederate protests that it was a barbarous weapon. After the war, the famous Parker gun was the result of the experience the company had acquired in the manufacture of firearms. It was continued as a local product until 1934, when the business was sold to the Remington Arms Company of Connecticut. Parker guns are still highly prized.

Mr. Parker was his own salesman in the busy period after the Civil War. He made one trip during the year, starting immediately after New Year's Day, and visiting the wholesale hardware houses which were accustomed to giving him orders for their full yearly requirements.

Meriden in the 1840's was shaking off the old, crude methods of small shops and turning to the first trials of multiple machine processes. Skilled craftsmanship, however, was to remain a mark of Meriden products, and the best features of the old skills have been retained up to the present. Their retention has helped to uphold the reputation for quality which has always gone with the goods sent out from here to circle the world.

Meriden's greatest industry — silver manufacturing — was still in the embryo stage when the 40's began. It did not spring to life as a fledgling of recognizable breed. At first, it was a sort of hybrid creature with tin wings, a pewter body, and a head faintly coated with a semblance of silver. This was the offspring of the little shops.

Ashbil Griswold and others were making pewter kitchen utensils in Meriden as early as 1808. Difficulty in obtaining tin had interfered with the production of britannia metal by processes known even earlier. Pewter ware was a sort of bridge to overcome the scarcity of tin, and when tin became more plentiful, britannia entered its day. It was more brilliant in appearance, harder and

more resistant to wear, and could be cleaned and polished to a high lustre. The peddlars were able to sell britannia articles in quantity to housewives.

By 1850, Ashbil Griswold, the pioneer, was producing britannia ware in North Meriden or Fraryville. James A. Frary and Couch & Benham made similar wares nearby. In East Meriden or Bangall, Isaac C. Lewis, George Curtis, and Darius Bingham, Jr. turned out britannia ware in addition to pewter. The Curtises, Edwin E. and Lemuel J., were making britannia on Curtis Street. Enos Curtis had a britannia factory at the north end on Britannia Street. The pewter shop of William W. Lyman was also on Britannia Street. S. L. Cone and L. G. Baldwin were also engaged in britannia manufacture. The contribution of Charles Parker has already been mentioned. Some factories employed 40 or more hands.

The expansion of the silver industry in the 50's and 60's was being duplicated on a somewhat lesser scale by other Meriden industries during the same period. It was a period of pioneering in new lines of goods and new methods for making them.

Jedediah Wilcox was one of the manufacturers who seemed to be making rapid progress. Starting in 1848, with carpetbags as his first product, he founded J. Wilcox & Co. in 1853, and began making leather belts. He was his own salesman, and soon managed to run up his gross sales to \$300,000 a year. Hoop skirts and corsets were added to the line. The factory, at the corner of Pratt and Camp Streets, employed more than 500 hands in 1860. In 1865, just as business was pouring in, the factory was destroyed by fire. It was replaced with a new brick structure on the other side of Pratt Street. About this time, Jedediah's interests turned from woollen goods to silver. On Dec. 23, 1865, with his brother Horace, Charles Parker, Aaron Collins, Hezekiah Miller and others, he established the Wicox Silver Plate Company for the manufacture of holloware. The company was installed in the plant where woollen goods had been made.

Another Meriden concern which had its beginnings in the same period took root and grew so flourishingly that it survived all the vicissitudes which forced some other local plants to wither and fade before the century ran out. Edward Miller & Co. was incorporated in 1866, with a capital of \$200,000, with Edward Miller as president, F. J. Seymour as secretary and W. H. Perkins as treasurer. The first products were lamp trimmings, for oil,



fluid, and kerosene lamps, together with numerous articles of brass, copper, German silver, iron, and britannia.

Edward Miller, who had begun his career in the 40's making candlestick springs, using foot and horse-power, was on the road to becoming one of the city's foremost manufacturers. His company went through every stage in the evolution of lighting equipment, from the earliest types of oil lamps to the most modern systems of fluorescent illumination in use today. With the advent of electricity as a lighting source, it turned to the manufacture of electric lamps, and the business has never ceased to progress with the changing times. The later history of the company will be considered in another chapter.

Foster, Merriam & Co., incorporated in 1866, is only a memory today, although it survived for more than 30 years of the next century. John Sutliff was president, when the corporation began, and Albert Foster was secretary and treasurer. The original product was furniture casters. The company employed 60 persons about 1870. It was the outgrowth of a business which dated back to 1835.

Foster Merriam sold out the caster business in 1927. In 1914, the company had been reorganized with a new group of men over its operation. A further reorganization followed in 1926. In 1933, part of the plant was destroyed by fire. J. B. Coggins bought the remaining buildings in 1940. The business today is operated by the J. B. Coggins Mfg. Company, with J. Blaine Coggins as president. His son, Leslie Coggins, is associated with him as vice president of the firm.

In 1849, a year which might be designated as opening the first period of rapid industrial growth here, there were 35 principal manufacturers, employing approximately 540 hands.

The stage was being set for greater enterprise when Horace C. Wilcox took to the road with the Yankee peddlars. He was an energetic young man with a keen eye for business, which he kept open for saleable lines of merchandise to add to the stocks on his neat wagon. Born in Westfield Parish, Middletown, in 1824, he had tired early of the life of the farm, and decided to undertake selling peddler's wares. His brother Dennis had similar inclinations, and had done some peddling of tin between farm crops before Horace owned his first wagon. The two brothers were to become super-salesmen, and they never lost the touch of

master salesmanship even after many years of service as executives of the industry they helped to found.

While still a peddler, Horace became acquainted with the Rogers brothers of Hartford, who had developed a new process for the plating of silver. They imported German silver spoons and forks which they were able to coat with pure silver. These were most attractive articles for the peddlars' markets, and Horace added a stock of them to his line, finding that they sold well. They helped the Wilcox brothers to accumulate the capital to participate in the founding of a new local enterprise.

This enterprise was the Meriden Britannia Company, organized in 1852 by Horace C. Wilcox, Dennis C. Wilcox, Isaac C. Lewis, William W. Lyman, Lemuel J. Curtis, John Munson, and James A. Frary. The next year, Samuel Simpson of Wallingford entered the group as an associate. The idea behind the project was to produce a more practical and economical plan for selling the products of the various shops. Horace and Dennis, with their practical experience in selling, had much more to contribute than their small stake of capital.

The first office and warerooms were in a building owned by Horace C. Wilcox. It stood at the corner of West Main and South Colony Streets.

The office was under the supervision of Horace and Dennis Wilcox and Isaac C. Lewis, and the entire business was directed from this headquarters.

West of the building, where the Palace Block now stands, was the residence of Horace C. Wilcox. His son, George H. Wilcox, who was to rise to the presidency of the industry which developed from these beginnings, was born in this house a few years after the Meriden Britannia Company was founded.

Soon after the company began business, it started experimenting with the process which the Rogers brothers in Hartford had proved practicable. These experiments were conducted in a building previously used as a barn. It was located on Hanover Street, just south of the Wilcox residence.

A short time later, the company erected its first buildings for finishing, assembling, and plating on the southeast corner of State and Miller Streets. This plant was in operation by 1855. But until the early sixties most of the actual manufacturing of britannia holloware was conducted in the small, individual plants which had



been taken over in 1852.

In its first full year of operations, Meriden Britannia sold wares made by its own plants and purchased from the other manufacturers amounting to more than \$250,000 gross.

By 1862, the Rogers brothers of Hartford were in financial difficulties, and the Meriden Britannia Company bought their equipment, including tools and dies, and moved all of this material to Meriden. An arrangement was made with William, Asa, and Simeon Rogers whereby they were to direct and supervise the manufacture of 1847 Rogers Bros. silverplate in Meriden. Thus one of the most famous brand names of American industry became identified with this city.

The Civil War had begun, but war did not stay the progress of the organization which had just passed its first decade. It needed more manufacturing space and equipment. On July 1, 1863, ground was broken on the west side of State Street for the first brick building. Soon, other large additions were made, including a building to house the power plant, and a factory chimney which was to stand for more than three-quarters of a century.

People were begining to call the State Street plant the "Big Shop," a name which is heard to this day. But there was still more than a trace of the primitive in the character of its trade. Many miscellaneous items were carried in the line, including japanned tinware. Britannia shipments were made in exchange for fur, feathers, or cordwood. In 1858, the company sold \$32,408 worth of Lyman patent fruit jars. Another popular item was the sewing bird for home seamstresses, of which \$30,000 worth were sold in 1853.

By 1860, the company employed 320 hands and produced half a million dollars worth of plated wares annually. Agencies had been opened in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco and products were being shipped overseas.

By this time, the general office of the company was adjacent to the doorway, still in existence, almost opposite Miller Street. Isaac C. Lewis and George R. Curtis occupied this office until 1866 when a one-story office building was constructed at the south end of the plant. It was raised to four stories in 1899. An additional section was built in 1876 for the use of executives and directors of the company.

In 1877, the business of Rogers, Smith & Co. of New Haven, which the company owned, was moved here into a new building erected for it on State Street.

The selling ability of Horace and Dennis Wilcox proved fruitful for the company from the beginning. Both men, with James D. Frary, made frequent sales trips and arranged for the establishment of the various branches in large cities.

Meanwhile, the company's wares were winning favorable attention wherever they were displayed. At the Centennial in Philadelphia in 1876, in New Orleans in 1885, in Paris at the Universal Exposition in 1889, and at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, they received high awards.

In 1869, Parker & Casper Co., a small local concern, was purchased and consolidated with the Wilcox Silver Plate Company. Samuel Dodd was secretary and treasurer, and remained in that capacity until the International Silver Company was organized in 1898.

Isaac C. Lewis, who had been president of the Meriden Britannia Company from the beginning, as well as its general superintendent, retired from both positions in 1866. He was a quiet gentleman of many accomplishments, who made a deep imprint upon Meriden affairs. He served as mayor for three years, and as a representative in the legislature four times in the last century. Horace C. Wilcox was elected to succeed him in the company and Dennis Wilcox became secretary.

Since acquiring the Rogers Bros. trademark, sales had risen rapidly, reaching a volume of \$2,500,000 annually by 1878. To care for the growing volume of business, a factory was erected in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1879, and placed under the management of J. H. Parker, formerly associated with various Meriden industries.

George R. Curtis, treasurer of Meriden Britannia, and a director of the Wilcox Silver Plate Company, was another leader in company affairs and a community leader as well. He became president of the Meriden Horse Railroad and of the Meriden Gas Light Company, a director of the Home National Bank, and served as alderman and councilman in the period between the 70's and the 90's. His son, George M. Curtis, began as a clerk with Meriden Britannia and rose to become a director of the company. He was a director also of the Home Bank and the



Curtis Library, which was presented to the city by Mrs. Augusta Munson Curtis.

Horace C. Wilcox was president of Meriden Britannia from 1866 to 1889. He died in 1890. During his fruitful career, he was also president of the Wilcox & White Organ Company. His interest in the short line railways absorbed much of his time and capital in his late years. He was Meriden's fifth mayor, and served in the State Senate in 1877.

Prior to the formation of the International Silver Company, the lines of the Meriden Britannia Company and the other local silverplate company had already become the most important in the entire silverware industry. In 1898, 13 independent companies, not including those in Canada, were consolidated. The next year, four were added, and several more in the years that followed. The names of the companies participating in the consolidation into the International were the Meriden Britannia Company, including Hall, Elton & Co.; Rogers, Smith & Co.; Forbes Silver Co.; Wilcox & Evertsen; Rogers & Bro.; Middletown Plate Co.; Wm. Rogers Mfg. Co.; Wilcox Silver Plate Co., including Parker & Casper Co.; Simpson, Hall, Miller & Co.; Simpson Nickel Co.; Meriden Silver Plate Co.; Rogers Cutlery Co.; Derby Silver Co.; Manhattan Silver Plate Co.; Holmes & Edwards Silver Co.; Barbour Silver Co., including Hartford Silver Plate Co.; Rogers & Hamilton Co.; Norwich Cutlery Co.; Watrous Mfg. Co.; C. Rogers & Bros.; LaPierre Mfg. Co.; E. G. Webster & Son; American Silver Co.; Rowley Mfg. Co.; Southington Cutlery Co., silverware department; Silver City Plate Co.

Many of these concerns operating separate factories were shortly combined or consolidated with others, and a new cutlery plant was established in Northampton, Mass.

With the incorporation of the International Silver Company in 1898, the following officers were elected: Samuel Dodd president; George H. Wilcox, first vice president; George C. Edwards, second vice president; C. A. Hamilton, third vice president; Samuel Thomas, treasurer; George M. Curtis, assistant treasurer; George Rockwell, secretary. Directors were: Samuel L. Barbour, George M. Curtis, Samuel Dodd, George C. Edwards, C. A. Hamilton, H. J. Lewis, G. D. Munson, Edwin M. Post, George Rockwell, E. R. Thomas, O. F. Thomas, W. H. Watrous, Frederick P. Wilcox, George H. Wilcox.

Most of the directors were actively engaged in the business. Only five of them had no active part in its operations.

On the list will be recognized the names of men whose descendants have continued to play an important part in the affairs of the company to this day.

By 1890, Maltby, Stevens & Curtiss Co., headed by Elizur Seneca Stevens, Chapman Maltby and John Curtiss, were making silverware in Wallingford in a plant built by Hall, Elton & Co. Their output was silverplated by Wm. Rogers Mfg. Co. of Hartford. Through this association, George D. Munson, a long-time employee of W. H. Watrous and member of an old Wallingford family, was brought into the new company. After its affiliation, the Wallingford plant became Factory P. The factory of Simpson, Hall, Miller & Co., makers of Rogers Brand silverware, was also acquired, and this plant became the center for the manufacture of sterling silverware.

The further progress of the company, chronologically, belongs in the industrial history of Meriden during the twentieth century.

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The Curtiss Way Company, large edition printers, was formed by the late James A. Curtiss and William H. Way in 1899. The late Roy J. Warren was president from 1915 until 1942. The business was sold in 1942 to the Eastern Color Printing Company of Waterbury, which retained the Pratt Street plant and erected a new bindery on Gracey Avenue.

The Meriden Gravure Company, which specializes in full-tone picture reproductions, was established in 1888 by the late J. F. Allen. It has won national prominence by its illustrations for fine books. The firm is still in the control of the Allen family. E. H. Hugo is vice president and general manager.

The Journal Press was established in 1886 by The Journal Publishing Company, and was sold in 1918 to the Connecticut Calendar Company. Until 1956, the firm occupied quarters in the Journal's old mechanical plant, which has been torn down. It now occupies a new plant on South Broad Street. The business is operated by Charles G. Dossin.

The Hull Printing Company was established in 1891 at 134 Hanover Street by the late Charles C. Hull, and has been owned and operated for many years by his son, Charles C. Hull, Jr., who erected the present plant at 35 Meridian Street.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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### The Civil War

THE EXPANDING Meriden of the middle of the last century had opened Southern markets for local products through the trips of its enterprising peddlars into the South. These lively but thoroughly respectable vendors were the forerunners of the traveling salesmen and manufacturers' representatives who carried the story of Meriden to all parts of the country in later eras. Although they operated from wagons and did business along country lanes, they built up a surprisingly large volume of trade. They were an important link in the somewhat feeble line of communications between North and South, for they acted as unofficial roving ambassadors carrying portfolios of good will — but they could do little to quiet the seething controversies of the times.

Meriden stood on the side of the Union and against the contention that rights of the individual states should outweigh the principles on which the Union was founded. Meriden was strongly opposed to the institution of slavery. Manufacturers and other business interests here were quite capable of sacrificing trade to uphold their opinions on these issues. They expressed themselves vehemently as the debate gathered and spread.

But there were some in Connecticut who thought differently, and who proposed to hold a convention to issue resolutions favorable to the Southern cause. One representative of this group called upon Julius Pratt, well known local comb manufacturer, urging him to sign the call for the meeting. Mr. Pratt not only refused to sign; after listening to the arguments that it was to his interests to do so, he spoke up sharply. "If the people of the South do not want to buy our Meriden combs because of what we think, then let them go lousy."

A country lawyer named Abraham Lincoln was a rising figure in the middle west, but Meriden knew little of him until the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 brought his name into prominence, and even then the interest in him here was slight.

When Abraham Lincoln came to Meriden March 7, 1860 to

address a Republican rally in the town hall, few would have been willing to concede that he had any chance for the presidency. Although he had been mentioned as a possibility for the Republican nomination, his real strength was unsuspected. The famous Cooper Union address had been delivered February 27, but its effects had hardly begun to accumulate. He had spoken in New Haven the day he came here, repeating some of the sentiments he had uttered at Cooper Union, but there is no record of what he said at the town hall. The only local newspaper of the day was the *Meriden Banner*, a Democratic weekly published by A. B. Stillman. It did not print the text or even excerpts from Lincoln's address, but gave its own interpretation of his remarks. For example, this passage: "The speaker, on being introduced to the audience, commenced the exordium of a tediously dull and uninteresting speech. It was commonplace in the extreme, and the principles (or ideas) he labored to enforce were narrow, bigoted and fallacious, directly antagonistic to the legislative action and official decisions of the government from its inception down to the present time."

There were few flourishes in connection with Lincoln's reception, but a quartet sang during the intervals of the program. Its members were Arthur Alfred Barker, partner in the clothing firm of Barker & Finnegan, E. B. Everitt, agent of the Wilcox Realty Company, and William K. Butler and Elisha K. Bradley, both of whom left Meriden years later to reside in Hartford.

The event was commemorated 88 years later, when a Lincoln plaque, designed by Louis Gudebrod, local sculptor, was placed on the city hall. This memorial was dedicated May 30, 1948, when it was presented to Mayor Howard E. Houston, representing the city, by Francis C. Upham, representing the Lincoln Memorial Committee. Mr. Upham is a son of Col. Charles L. Upham, one of Meriden's outstanding soldiers in the war which was to follow Lincoln's visit here by only 13 months.

On March 4, 1861, Lincoln was inaugurated as President. The war clouds were gathering fast and spreading over Meriden as they spread elsewhere. The Confederate States of America had been formed at Montgomery, Alabama, early in February, and Jefferson Davis had been chosen president of the Confederacy. The first incident of war occurred when Fort Sumter was attacked on April 12, and the immediate effect was the President's



call for 75,000 volunteers "to repossess the forts, places and property which has been seized, and to maintain the perpetuity of popular government." By that signal, Connecticut was drawn into the struggle beside the other loyal states of the Union, and Meriden began preparing at once to do its part.

On April 16, Governor Buckingham called for volunteers to form one regiment of infantry to serve three months. The Meriden Light Guards, under Capt. Theodore Byxbee, was the only military organization in Meriden. The morning after the governor's proclamation was issued, Capt. Byxbee reported to the adjutant general in Hartford that the organization was ready to respond to the call.

A war meeting was held in the town hall on April 19. The Hon. Charles Parker, who was to become the first mayor of the incorporated city only eight years later, presided over the meeting. Patriotic speeches were made by Orville H. Platt, Dexter R. Wright, the Rev. D. Henry Miller, and G. H. Wilson. It was unanimously voted to instruct the selectmen to call a town meeting immediately for the purpose of appropriating \$5,000 to equip the Meriden Light Guard. Mr. Parker, according to the *Century of Meriden*, "announced his purpose to give each member a Colt's revolver."

The \$5,000 was voted in due course, with part of the money to be devoted, if necessary, to supporting the families of the volunteers. Isaac C. Lewis, John Parker, Humphrey Lyon, and Moses Waterman were named as a committee to supervise the expenditure of the funds.

The Light Guard was required to reorganize as a company of volunteers and was mustered into the state service on April 22, 1861. It was assigned to the First Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers, as Company F, and left for Washington May 10, the first body of men from Meriden to enter the struggle.

A second company to serve three months went into rendezvous April 29, and was assigned to the Third Regiment as Rifle Company B. It departed May 23. These Meriden companies were in Keyes' Brigade, Tyler's Division. They met the rebels at Bull Run, showing great gallantry. Upon their return to Meriden after serving out the term of their enlistment, a grand parade and ball were held to mark their homecoming.

In the summer of 1861, another company was formed, and

assigned to the Seventh Regiment as Company C. This company was in the expedition to Port Royal, was the first to land, with its flags first on the soil of South Carolina.

Company K of the Eighth Regiment was recruited late in the summer of 1861. It left the state October 17, and became part of the Burnside Expedition. From North Carolina, it was sent to reinforce the Army of the Potomac when Lee invaded Maryland. At the battle of Antietam, these volunteers advanced farther than any other Union forces in their part of the field. Their losses exceeded 50 per cent.

Company B of the Ninth Regiment was composed of Meriden residents of Irish descent. It left the state November 4 for Lowell, Mass., and was sent from there to Ship Island, Mississippi Sound. It served with credit in the Department of the Gulf until 1864. It was then sent to Bermuda Hundred and, in August 1864, to Sheridan's Army in the Shenandoah Valley. It took part in the battle of Cedar Creek, and was finally mustered out of service on August 3, 1865.

Companies A and F of the 15th Regiment were organized during August 1862. While in camp August 25, women of Meriden, represented by the Misses Helen Bradley and Mary Brooks, presented the company with a silk flag, and Orville Platt made the address of presentation. Col. Wright of the regiment responded. To him a black stallion was presented by a group of Meriden men, represented by the Hon. Charles Parker.

The regiment participated in the battle of Fredericksburg, the siege of Suffolk and of Virginia by Longstreet, and in engagements in North Carolina. It lost many men during an epidemic of yellow fever and also lost severely in the actions before Kingston, N. C., in 1865. The regiment was mustered out at New Berne, N. C., and returned to New Haven July 4, 1865.

Company G of the 27th Regiment enlisted for nine months and was mustered into service in October 1862. The regiment became part of the Army of the Potomac. Its members were actively engaged at the battles of Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg. They were composed only in part of Meriden men. The regiment was mustered out of service July 27, 1863.

Due to transfers from one military unit to another, it is difficult to determine the exact number of men from Meriden who served at one time or another during the Civil War, but the



companies mentioned mustered 671. Meriden men connected with other units of the armed service numbered 286, omitting substitutes who deserted.

According to Davis' *History of Wallingford, Meriden and Cheshire*, published 1870, 108 Meriden soldiers lost their lives in the struggle to preserve the Union.

Many local soldiers won commissions, the records show. There were one general, three colonels, one lieutenant colonel, two majors, three chaplains, 14 captains, 16 first lieutenants, 19 second lieutenants.

The losses, especially among those who served in the later phases of the war, were severe, and the strain upon Meriden to furnish recruits, in response to the ever-increasing demand, was severe also.

To meet the demand, since service continued on a voluntary basis, various expedients were adopted. Paying bounties for volunteers became common practice, and Meriden town meetings again and again grappled with the problem of making such inducements sufficiently attractive.

A town meeting held July 16, 1862 voted that the town of Meriden appropriate the sum of \$50 bounty to be paid to each recruit enlisting in any Connecticut regiment then in the field, or in any subsequent regiment organized in the state in answer to the President's latest call for 300,000 men. Payments were also to be made to mothers and other dependents of such recruits, to supplement the payments from the state for the support of wives and children of volunteers. A town meeting on August 23, 1862 increased the bounty to \$100 for nine-month volunteers.

There was still another problem for the town when Congress on March 3, 1863, approved "an act for enrolling and calling out the National forces and for other purposes," which meant that a draft was imminent.

On August 24, 1863, a special town meeting took action to meet this situation. It voted that the selectmen be authorized to pay to each man who "may be hereafter drafted into the service of the United States" the sum of \$300 when mustered in. It also voted to pay to any man drafted who could furnish an acceptable substitute to serve in his own place a sum not to exceed \$300 when the substitute entered the service. This was an encouragement to a practice which had already become rather common, and which

seemed to carry no stigma, probably because there was still considerable opposition to service under compulsion.

Another town meeting on August 11, 1864, passed a resolution offered by the Hon. O. H. Platt to appropriate \$20,000 to encourage enlistments and pay the expenses of Meriden under the call for additional men. Up to \$300 would be paid for a three-year enlistment. Only two weeks later, a town meeting raised the inducement to \$600 for a three-year enlistment, and \$300 for a less period, the extra money to be raised by subscription. The four banks of the town were requested to loan in equal amounts, temporarily, the funds to put the resolutions into effect.

But the war was drawing to an end. If the practice of offering bounties had continued much longer, Meriden might have bankrupted itself. The surrender of Lee to Grant at Appomattox on April 9, 1865 put an end to the fighting, and there was no longer reason to pledge the town's funds to gain new soldiers. Instead, the town could turn to the problems incident to the resumption of normal ways of life.

Many of the Civil War veterans were to become outstanding citizens of their generation. In the days ahead, they were to help promote Meriden's economic well-being, to become active in every form of business and professional life and to assist in turning the town into an incorporated city. That event was only two years in the future.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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### City Government Before 1900

BETWEEN 1840 and 1850, the leisurely little village of Meriden was being taught to recognize some of its prospects for future growth through the advancement of its industries. In the 50's, the pace swiftened and the population practically doubled. The census of 1860 placed the figure at 7,426, which was to increase to 10,495 by 1870.

In 1866, with the Civil War in the background, the first efforts to obtain a city charter were made. It was argued that, under a charter, the community could have water works, street lights, police and fire departments, and a program of street improvement.

For the first time, there was a sense of integration in the local community, inspired in part by the veterans who had returned from the war with restless energies that sought an outlet in civic advancement. They banded with older leaders to improve conditions here.

On June 7, 1867, Charles Parker and 644 other local residents signed the petition for a charter, which was presented to the General Assembly for approval. The Legislature granted the charter only a little more than a month later.

The new city had an area of four square miles, and the list of taxable property was \$4,415,000.

A rather complex system of local government was installed at the beginning. The city then consisted roughly of what is now the second taxing district lying within the town, and the town itself was divided into school districts, each governed by a district committee which levied and collected its own school taxes. This condition existed until July 1896, when the school districts were consolidated. But consolidation of the city and the town did not take place until January 1, 1922, after a long battle to be recorded later.

The city government at first consisted of four aldermen and 16 councilmen forming the common council. At first, there were only four wards, but later a fifth was added. In June 1924, the fifth ward was divided into two districts. In June 1927, the

second and third wards were similarly divided, and in 1941 the fourth ward was also split into two parts, leaving the first ward the only one with a single voting place.

The new city government began at once to make city bylaws, but these were not printed until 1870 together with certain amendments to the charter to give the authority needed. The only known record of this action is preserved in the Curtis Memorial Library. A copy printed in 1875 is filed in the office of the city clerk. There are no known copies of the original charter in existence, although the common council ordered that 100 copies be published. The charter has been frequently amended and was reprinted in 1900. Another revision was printed in 1931. The bylaws have been reprinted, but no new edition of the charter has appeared since 1931.

Charles Parker, the stalwart pioneer of local industry, entered a new phase of his career as Meriden's first mayor. For him, 782 votes were cast in the first election against 17 "scattering." John H. Barrio, afterward colonel of the Second Regiment, Connecticut National Guard, was elected city clerk with 808 votes in his favor, and only three "scattering." The other city officials elected were Asahel H. Curtis, treasurer; Joel H. Guy, auditor; Samuel O. Church, collector; Patrick Garvey and James E. Belden, city sheriffs. The aldermen elected were William J. Ives, Hiram Butler, George W. Lyon, and Jedediah Wilcox. Councilmen were O. B. Arnold, Lemuel J. Curtis, Charles L. Upham, Charles A. Roberts, Eli Butler, Eli Ives, Hezekiah H. Miller, Augustus C. Markham, Aaron L. Collins, Isaac C. Lewis, Jared R. Cook, Horace C. Wilcox, Dennis C. Wilcox, John Byxbee, Walter Hubbard, and Jared Lewis.

Local manufactures and other forms of business were well represented in the governing group, which contained a liberal sprinkling of veterans as well.

There was much to be done, and the new city government lost no time in going into action.

One of the first necessities was for the provision of an adequate water supply system. For this, an amendment to the new charter was found necessary. It was approved July 24, 1868. But long before that date a controversy had arisen over reservoir locations. Mayor Parker on April 6, 1868 appointed a committee to search out and recommend sites. The relative merits of West Mountain



and Black Pond were debated vigorously.

Meriden had suffered frequent water famines, and pumping had to be done from outlying ponds. The problem of recurring water scarcity was not to be solved overnight, even after it had been approached in a concentrated and orderly manner. The West Mountain location was approved, and in June 1869 a bond issue of \$20,000 at 7 per cent was authorized. Construction of Merimere, the first reservoir, was begun. By 1873, it was reported that 1,554 families were being served with water through the pipes of the new system. In 1890, Kenmere reservoir was added, and Hallmere came next in 1895. In 1905, the Taylor farm of 96 acres was purchased for additional watershed. A further important step was taken in 1907, when the city bought the Fellows farm on Johnson Hill for a storage reservoir, but the storage basin was not completed, with pumping facilities, until 1913. In the following year, pipes were connected with Kenmere, and the new set-up was ready for service. It has served satisfactorily since that time, with certain changes and improvements as water demands increased. But the largest single water source to supply Meriden had already been made available to form a link in the system.

On February 1, 1909, the Broad Brook property of 23 acres was purchased for \$5,000, a bargain if there ever was one. The city appropriated \$350,000 in 1913 for the development of this reservoir, which was placed in service October 2, 1916. A filtration plant was added at Broad Brook in 1927. A new pumping station was built at Kenmere in 1931.

Meanwhile, the growth of the city was making constantly increasing demands upon the water system. Insufficient water pressure on the east side was an almost constant complaint in dry seasons. Taking advantage of the plentiful labor to be obtained at low cost, with government aid, during the depression, a pumping station was built under WPA at the corner of Charles Street and Parker Avenue for the low figure of \$6,205. This proved only a partial solution to the problem.

Residents on the high hills of the eastern section continued to complain of low pressure, especially during the summer months. During the administrations of Mayor Francis R. Danaher, a remedy was proposed in the form of a "Memorial" water tower, from which water could be fed by gravity to the east side. But nothing was done to place this measure in effect. Subsequently,

it was discovered that water pipes of small diameters were impeding the flow of water. The system was overhauled at many points to replace the pipe of old mains with pipe of larger diameter. Even earlier, the work of pipe laying had not been neglected. Under FERA, 9,655 feet of pipe were laid, and WPA installed 8,438 feet. In 1933, 13,378 feet of water pipe went under the ground, water sheds were cleared, and much of the system was practically rebuilt. But there has been no let-up in the demands for more water, and the future has to be considered.

Under Mayor Henry Altobello, the problem has been intensively studied by state and city engineers, and an independent firm has been engaged to make a survey. The full results of that survey are still to be made known, and action awaits the final recommendations of the engineers. But one measure has been advocated repeatedly under the present administration: the construction of a storage basin on the summit of one of the eastern hills. The use of Black Pond water, to be fed by way of New Dam, with a hook-up to Foster Lake could keep such a basin filled, it has been argued. Measurements of the water potentials of these sources has been made. But active steps to set the project in motion have not been taken up to the time of this writing.

Many years have been spanned in this consideration of the water system. But many other phases of the city's development began in that period when Mayor Parker and his official family were wrestling with the beginning problems of city government.

Fire protection was afforded on a haphazard basis by the old volunteer companies, who fought fires vigorously, but were more concerned in competing with one another than with quenching a blaze under competent direction. Police protection was lacking, also. Unpaved streets became seas of mud after every heavy rain. The few sidewalks were crude, and afforded uncertain footing. Street lights were missing altogether. There was no system of sewers. The cesspool was only a short distance from the well in many yards. All of these conditions called for immediate correction, but progress toward correcting them was slow. Mayor Parker could only make a start.

#### POLICE DEPARTMENT

To police Meriden in its earliest days as a city, a new department was created in September, 1868, when the common council, with



Mayor Parker presiding, voted to replace the constabulary with a permanent and regularly paid force. The department consisted officially of a chief and three patrolmen. William Hagadon was the first chief, and under him were Roger M. Ford, George Van Nostrand and Samuel N. Beach. Beach succeeded Hagadon the first year, and served until 1876. Other chiefs in order, during the remainder of the century, were Albert I. Otis, Frank G. Bolles, Roger M. Ford, and Captain George Van Nostrand, who had been with the department from the beginning, and continued as its head until 1906, shortly before Meriden celebrated its Centennial.

The department had no headquarters when it started. The lockup was in the basement of the town hall, and was a planked-in enclosure. The chief was on duty from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the patrolmen served from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., an arrangement of shifts which could only provide the most desultory police protection. But there were no large traffic problems to be dealt with, and serious crimes occurred infrequently. At the beginning, the men wore badges but had no uniforms. The most distinguishing article of their dress was the large hat, with flaring brim upturned at the side. Each man carried a club, a revolver, and "twisters" of catgut and wood, used in place of handcuffs. The chief received \$2.75 a day and the men \$2.50. In 1869, soon after Chief Beach's appointment, the department was quartered in a city-owned building on Pratt Street, where the fire department was also stationed. In 1883, it was moved into a room in the Rogers Block, at East Main and South Colony Streets. Four years later, headquarters was established in the remodeled town hall.

The Gamewell signal system, by which patrolmen on beat were able to make contact with headquarters periodically, was installed in 1890, and was considered a great advance in police methods. The plodding policeman on his beat was the mainstay of the force, but the limit of his speed in pursuing criminals was the limit of his running ability. A few horses and wagons helped to raise the limit as time went on, but it was not until much later that automobiles were employed. Of course, the crooks of the last century were equally handicapped in the matter of going places in a hurry, and some Meriden policemen came to be known as fast runners.

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

The organization of a fire department was delayed for a number of years after the incorporation of the city. The event which spurred its creation was the great Meriden Britannia Company fire which broke out early in the morning of July 16, 1870. Plans had been made for a convocation of volunteer fire companies on that day, and local citizen-firemen had met the preceding evening to make plans for receiving visiting firemen from Middletown. The first sack and bucket brigade, organized in 1849, was still going strong, but more as a social body than a group of serious fire fighters. Many other outfits of a similar nature had sprung up during the years. Active in 1867 were the Washington Engine Co. No. 2, Washington Hose Co. No. 2, the E. J. Doolittle Truck Co., Parker's Engine Co. No. 3 and Parker's Hose Co. No. 3. All of these had crude equipment, with pumps operated by hand. These were connected with wells, streams, or ponds until the installation of the water system made it possible for them to draw water from city mains.

The "Big Shop" fire was first noticed shortly after 1 a.m. by the pressroom foreman of the *Daily Republican*, which was already being run off the press. He and the editor rushed toward State Street, where smoke had already begun to billow. The engine of a southbound train, just drawing into the station, let off its whistle in long blasts and a gong sounded somewhere within the burning plant. Meriden's volunteers came running, dragging their feeble engines, and from that time on it was a wild scramble in which the rival companies were all engaged until the police had to break it up. At first more water was poured by the firemen on themselves than on the fire. Then the pumps of Meriden Britannia went into action, but by that time it was too late. The blaze was finally under control at about 6 a.m., but the plant was wrecked. The damage to building and machinery was estimated at \$250,000, most of it covered by insurance. Meriden had never seen a fire of such proportions, and the lesson was not to be ignored.

The confusion displayed by the well meaning but undisciplined volunteers on this occasion moved the *Meriden Literary Recorder* to comment, "If there had been any head or tail to the fire department, if John Byxbee or Charlie Warner had been chief engineer,



the fire would have been extinguished.”

The words were prophetic, for John C. Byxbee became chief engineer when a paid fire department was installed in 1873. He received \$500 a year, and was chief for two years. Edward A. Roark succeeded him. Other chiefs of the century's last quarter included Linus Moses, John F. Butler, Isaac B. Hyatt, Owen Horan and John Tracy. Tracy, who became chief in 1893, introduced white rubber coats and hats for the men of the department to distinguish them in the groups that always gathered at fires. The first horses to be used for drawing apparatus were stabled at the Charter Oak fire house. Hyatt was the only chief to serve twice. After resigning in 1888, he came back to the department in 1890, and was reappointed chief after a turn of the city administration in 1894.

Frank L. Cowing was made chief shortly before 1900 and served until his death in 1903. William L. Lucas, who had grown up with the department, succeeded him. By 1906, Meriden had a department consisting of 91 men. There were 16 fire horses to pull the heavy equipment, and 9,000 feet of hose. The apparatus then consisted of one hook-and-ladder truck, one Silsby steam fire engine, four hose wagons, and the chief's wagon. One two-wheeled hose pumper was held in reserve. The total property was valued at \$100,000. There were few changes in this picture until the introduction of motorized apparatus and the beginning of a whole new era in the development of more effective fire-fighting methods. But the fire companies, since the humiliating lessons of the Meriden Britannia fire, have always done well. Chief Byxbee, when he took charge, instituted the ward system of fire alarms. The Britannia Shop's big gong sounded one, two, three or four times to indicate in which of the four divisions the fire was located. In 1881, a fire-alarm telegraph system was introduced. St. Andrew's Church bell was used at first. Later a tower bell was installed at the old firehouse on Pratt Street. E. B. Baker, then manager of the Southern New England Telephone Company, was the first fire-alarm superintendent.

## STREETS

There were no paved streets in Meriden until the nineties. Photographs taken between 1870 and 1894 show the rutted, muddy or dusty surface of the principal thoroughfares even in

the center of the city. In 1894, Belgian block paving was laid on West Main Street. The blocks were of creosoted wood, and were especially slippery in wet weather, but they were a great improvement over the gravel which had been used previously. The blue-stone blocks employed for crossings at intersections were removed. In 1897, Hanover Street was paved, and the next year the whole "Corner" section was macadamized. Colony Street was paved in 1899, partly with asphalt and partly with Belgian block. In 1901, paving was completed on State Street. For the East Main Street hill, brick paving was selected, which remained in place for many years. The trolley tracks in the center of the street, where they abutted the bricks, were traps for automobile wheels, and caused frequent skids.

Paving bonds to the amount of \$200,000 were authorized by the Legislature in 1913. State Street was widened in 1914 near its intersection with East Main Street. A permanent paving program was instituted at that time, and many streets where paving was badly worn, were repaved. Another extensive program was approved and carried out in 1931, when East and West Main Streets, Hanover, Pratt, State, and Crown Streets and Cook Avenue were completely resurfaced. For the next decade, most of the work on streets was done as part of WPA projects. In 1941, practically all that was left of the old brick paving was removed and replaced with composition paving. Rails left from the era of trolley street transportation were buried or taken away.

A new road between Cheshire and Meriden was opened in 1929. The Chamberlain Highway between Meriden and New Britain, named for former Gov. Abiram Chamberlain, a native of Meriden, was opened in 1935, and the Westfield road was rebuilt the same year. In 1941, the construction of a four-lane parkway from North Broad Street to the Berlin line began. Eventually this route was widened all the way to Hartford. The Wilbur Cross Parkway, joining Route 5 into Hartford, was constructed during the 40's, and took the bulk of through passenger-car traffic away from Broad Street, although truck traffic continues to follow the old route where the stagecoaches once ran. Efforts to obtain state aid for the construction of an east-west by-pass of the city, to relieve the steadily increasing traffic congestion on East and West Main Streets, have so far been unavailing. The State Highway Department has refused to give this proposal priority in its program.



Repeated efforts have been made to induce action by the Legislature on the project, but all have fallen flat.

#### SEWAGE DISPOSAL

No attempt was made at the time when the city was incorporated to provide a municipal system of waste disposal. Not until 20 years later was the first action taken in this direction. In 1887, the common council ordered the first sewers installed on Main and Veteran Streets, but the vote to establish a sewer system was recorded September 23, 1891. On November 13 of that year, the city bought 150 acres of land in South Meriden for sewer beds, and the contract to construct the beds was let May 26, 1892. These beds served, with little further improvement, until complaints were made in the 30's that the Quinnipiac River was being contaminated from underground seepage. In 1937, the present sewage reduction plant was built, and opened March 18, 1938. The growth of Meriden since World War II has overtaxed the system of sewers. One of the questions now confronting the city is that of a complete overhauling of the system, and the construction of a new plant for final disposal. It is a question which calls for an answer in the near future.

# The Spanish War

THE PEACEFUL life of Meriden residents in the 90's was interrupted by the Spanish War, which began in 1898. The sinking of the U. S. battleship Maine in Havana Harbor, February 15, 1898, made banner headlines in newspapers across the country. Indignation was almost universal, and the event was feverishly discussed in many Meriden homes. War sentiment gathered rapidly. President William McKinley demanded the withdrawal of Spain from Cuba. A blockade of Cuban ports was placed in effect on April 24. The next day, Congress declared that a state of war had existed since April 21.

Company L, consisting of Meriden volunteers, was organized under Capt. Charles B. Bowen in the summer of 1898, with Delbert Jones as first lieutenant and Raymond Keeney as second lieutenant. It was assigned to the First Connecticut Regiment and mustered into service in July at the town hall. The company was then transferred to Fort Knox, Maine for training, and was sent from there to Niantic. It wound up in Camp Alger, Virginia, where the local volunteers remained until their return to Connecticut, where they were mustered out on October 31. Although not actually engaged in combat at any period of their service, the men of Company L underwent many trials, for conditions in military camps during the war were far from what they should have been. Rations were indescribably bad. Sanitary conditions were even worse. Many in the local company became ill, and some of them felt the after-effects for years.

The Spanish War has been minimized in some accounts through comparison with some of the other conflicts in which this country has engaged, but it was serious enough for those who had a part in it. Followed by the Philippine insurrection, it lasted for four years and two months, compared with four years for the Civil War and one year and seven months for World War I. In it, 450,000 of our troops were engaged, exceeding the number in the Revolutionary War, the Mexican War and the War of 1812. Losses in deaths from all causes were 4.3 per cent as compared



with six-tenths of one per cent for the Civil War. These statistics and others were furnished by Captain Charles B. Bowen Camp, United Spanish War Veterans when it held an anniversary observance April 25, 1936.

Since the death of the last Meriden veteran of the Civil War, the Spanish War veterans are the senior group among all organizations of veterans, and wear their responsibilities with becoming vigilance and patriotic fervor in spite of their diminishing numbers. There has been no event in commemoration of Meriden's participation in the various wars in which these members of U. S. W. V. have not played an organizational and inspirational role.

The Bowen Camp was organized in 1900, and became affiliated with the U. S. W. V. on April 18, 1904. The organizers were mainly men of Company L, but the group also included men who had served in Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and China, as well as in the U. S. Navy and various camps in addition to Camp Alger.

Mementoes of the Spanish War are in various parts of the city. A shell received from the War Department, as the result of efforts by the late Thomas L. Reilly, who was mayor of Meriden and later congressman and sheriff of New Haven County, was placed in City Park. There also is a large granite stone with a nameplate in honor of Capt. Bowen. In the club room of the organization is a bronze tablet, made of metal taken from the wreckage of the battleship Maine.

But the most striking memorial of the services of the Spanish War veterans is the Hiker Shaft on Memorial Boulevard, Broad Street. On November 13, 1940, Francis R. Danaher, then mayor, received a request from Past Commander Edward B. Hall, memorial chairman of the Bowen Camp, for \$3,000 of city funds to be applied to the erection of this monument. Dr. Ernest W. Spicer, adjutant of the camp, supplied a list of 206 names to be inscribed upon it. The list was compiled by the late William G. Hiller. The monument consists of the bronze figure of an infantryman holding a rifle across his body. The figure is eight feet high, and stands on a Barre granite base. It was placed on the second green of the boulevard.

When the Hiker Memorial was dedicated, November 23, 1941, the event was marked by a parade containing units of all veterans groups and sons and daughters of veterans, with ceremonies held

afterward when the monument was unveiled. At that time, 18 members of Company L were alive, but the number has dwindled since.

During World War II, on October 8, 1942, the Bowen Camp contributed to the scrap drive then in progress one of its cherished mementoes, the cannon "Asaltador," which had helped to defend Morro Castle on Havana Harbor.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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### Street Railways

WHILE THE battle of the "short lines" was moving toward a climax through the extension of interurban railroads set up to compete with the New Haven, Meriden was entering a new phase of transportation within the city limits.

The street railway system began with the horse as its source of motive power. The Meriden Horse Railroad started operations in 1886, with lines along the principal streets of the city. The growth of population and the spread of local industry assured its success almost from the start. Horses, although slow, were reliable, and riding the cars was a great improvement on walking to and from work. For two years, the system did well — until the great fire of January 10, 1888. The Pratt Street barns, where the horses were stabled, burned to the ground with the loss of 79 horses, and total destruction of property valued at \$43,000.

This disaster did not put the road out of business, but it did result in its electrification. On February 26, 1888 the Daft system was adopted. Daft was an appropriate name for it, in view of the defects of its design. Two sets of small wheels ran on parallel overhead wires, the current from which was drawn through a pole attached to the roof of the car. These wheels were often dislodged, and the car's crew had to put them back into place. The jiggling poles were a strain on the car's roof, and leaks developed. In rainy weather, water poured down on the heads of passengers. The new system went into operation July 11, 1888, and the troubles began amost at once. After several months, the company decided it had had enough of Daft, and went back to horses.

On September 17, 1892, John W. Coe and C. W. Cahill, both connected with the Swift packing interests, bought out the horse railroad. They owned it until October 18, 1893 when a Philadelphia syndicate purchased it, and set plans in motion to electrify it. The electrification was successful. Overhead wires were used as before, and the current was carried through poles in the same manner, but the connection to the wires was firm, and the cars

proved reliable in service. Nine new cars were put into operation in January 1894. The horses were sold. One hundred of them went to one purchaser.

A party of officials took the first trip over the line and attended a gala performance of "Pinafore" at the Meriden Opera House.

The first accident to be recorded occurred January 6, 1894, at Wallace's bridge, when one of the cars hit a wagon, but the only damage was a broken axle on the wagon.

The Meriden trolleys ran until 1932, when all street railway service was abandoned here, and the buses of the Connecticut Company took over the assignment of providing public transportation within the city limits and to the suburbs.

The trolley rails were removed in some places and covered over in others. The routes in service while the system was in full operation included Colony Street, Britannia Street and Griswold Street as far as Cambridge Street, with turn-outs opposite the Bradley Home, then the residence of Clarence P. Bradley, and near the center, about opposite Mosher's Drug Store; also the length of East and West Main Streets, with cars running as far east as Pomeroy Avenue. A branch line served Curtis Street and adjacent streets. Another line ran up Pratt Street to Broad, and through cars followed the old route through Brookside Park, across Broad Street and on to Westfield. There was also electric car service on Hanover Street and to Hanover Park, which flourished as an amusement park through the first quarter of the century, although its heyday was probably in the "gay nineties."



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

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### Notes of a Spacious Era

THE THREE decades which closed the nineteenth century and the opening decade of the twentieth century were an era of spacious, leisured living. During these 40 years, plus a few extra for good measure, Meriden was growing up. A pattern of industrial growth had been established. The city was pushing ahead, but the pressure applied was easy and natural. It was the difference between shaking the reins over the old mare's back and cramming a heavy foot upon the accelerator that lets loose the power of 200 horses.

There was probably never a time before or since when the average citizen could get so much fun out of life with a minimum of nervous strain. The so-called horse-and-buggy age was also an age of bicycles, open-sided trolley cars in summer, basket picnics for the whole family, band concerts, firemen's parades, special excursions on the railroads and the short lines, Turner festivals, Saengerbund conventions, and boating under the moon over Hanover Pond.

There was roller skating at the Meriden rink on Hanover Street, near the corner of Randolph Avenue, with instruction for patrons who needed it, and music in the evenings. Exhibitions of speed and fancy skating were held weekly. Roller polo, a game for agile assassins, who banged at one another as much as at the puck, provided added excitement. Roller polo leagues were promoted for profit, and some of the individual stars gained a statewide reputation. It was a game as fast as hockey, but even rougher. Masquerade parties were also held at the rink. The German-American Society sponsored some of the largest of these events.

From the 80's on, the carriage horse had a mechanical rival that brought individual transportation within the reach of almost everybody. It was the bicycle, which multiplied the possibilities of the leg muscles for getting from place to place. The bicycle, originally called a velocipede, had been designed as far back as 1865. A velocipede, ridden by a Frenchman named Lillement, appeared in New Haven in 1871. The front wheel was enormous,

but the back wheel was about the size of the wheel of a baby buggy, and it was all too easy to take a "header" over the handlebars. Nevertheless, there were plenty of young men in Meriden willing to take a chance with one of these contraptions.

Meriden came in early in this sport, largely because of the Meriden Wheel Club, organized December 18, 1880, when there were only about a dozen local citizens who had ever ridden a bicycle. At first the club met in the office of Dr. T. S. Rust, dentist, but in 1882 moved into quarters in the Palace Block, which it occupied until after its 25th anniversary, when the group was disbanded.

The organization charged only 25 cents a year dues and gained a membership of about 200. It was the oldest and easily the most active of the wheel clubs of the state, exerting a powerful influence for legislation favorable to cyclists. Henry T. King, state representative, later to serve as Meriden's World War I mayor, was secretary. With J. E. Brainard, president of the club, he was instrumental in the organization of the Connecticut Federation of Cyclists. They took the lead in drawing up, introducing, and supporting bills for the regulation of bicycle traffic and the improvement of roads for the benefit of bicycle riders, promoting the construction of graveled bicycle paths paralleling the main highways. Other outstanding members of the club were Dr. Rust, Max E. Miller, William Collins, Frank A. Stevens, Reuben J. Rice, Wells McMasters, Joseph Hyde, E. J. Pooley, Harry A. Stevens, Albert L. Stetson, John W. Lane, and C. Win King.

The League of American Wheelmen held their national convention here one year in the old city hall that was destroyed by fire in 1904.

The local pioneers of bicycling were soon joined by many others, both men and women. Introduction of the safety bicycle, with wheels of the same size, popularized the sport with women. When tandem bicycles came along, husband and wife, boy and girl friend could go far into the country on Sunday afternoons, with other companions or just as a twosome. The more zealous cyclists took part in "century runs," covering a hundred miles or more in one trip.

Some even went touring on their vacations astride of wheels. A party consisting of A. H. Wilcox, W. H. Squire, J. E. Brainard,



L. C. Evarts, the Rev. J. W. Logan, W. F. Hutchinson, Arthur E. Hall, G. N. Shepley, Charles Bryant, and George Brown took a trip by wheel from Meriden to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 1894. They covered more than 500 miles on their bicycles, traveling the rest of the way on boats and trains.

The gentlemen riders, who took it easy and managed to survey at least part of the countryside, were sometimes forced off the road by the speed demons known as "scorchers." These were the equivalent of the more reckless "hot rodders" of today. Wearing loud caps and tight-fitting jerseys, they bent low over the handlebars, and made the dust and chickens fly.

There were real speed artists, the genuine article, who competed in regulated contests. Meriden had a number of outstanding wheelmen in this class, among them Arthur M. Curtis, who held the New York to Boston record, and Daniel J. Canary, who became world-famous as a trick cyclist as well as a fast rider. He traveled all over the United States, in Britain and the countries of Europe, giving exhibitions of his daring and skill.

Some local sportsmen liked to stage impromptu contests for side bets. Arthur Curtis was once induced to take part in a novel race with a running horse owned by Charles H. Cheeney as his competitor. The race started from the corner of Cook Avenue and Hanover Street, and the finish line was at the post office in Yalesville. The horse was hitched to a sulky. Curtis was paced by the tandem team of E. K. Brainard and W. L. Barnard, which dropped out at Walnut Grove cemetery. By that time, the horse was out of sight. But the cyclist put on an extra burst of speed and caught up to the rig at the culvert in Yalesville. A little farther along, he passed the horse, and crossed the finish line as the winner by a considerable margin.

Tennis, often called "rackets," was becoming popular here in the late 90's. At the old courts on Lincoln Street, some of the well-known young business and professional men of the city liked to play in the late summer afternoon. Abiram Chamberlain, president of the Home National Bank was reported to be "no mean adversary." Willis J. Prouty, of the high school faculty, was another staunch contestant. Robert W. Carter, Dr. E. W. Pierce, James P. Platt, A. B. Mather, John W. Coe, and Buell Goodsell were among the regulars of the period. The Meriden Lawn Tennis Club was formed in 1887, and promoted the sport

vigorously for a decade or more.

Golf had its beginnings here a little later than tennis. The Meriden Golf Club was organized in 1898 at the residence of Dr. E. T. Bradstreet. A golf course in those days was known as a "links," because the holes were laid out like a string of link sausages bent into some peculiar shapes. The first golf links was on North Colony Street, just beyond the railroad underpass. It consisted of nine holes, hewn roughly out of cow pasture. Gutta percha or "feather" balls were used, with a range, for the best players, of 50 to 60 yards. When a new ball was invented that would carry 150 to 175 yards, some of the players objected to it because it could be lost too easily.

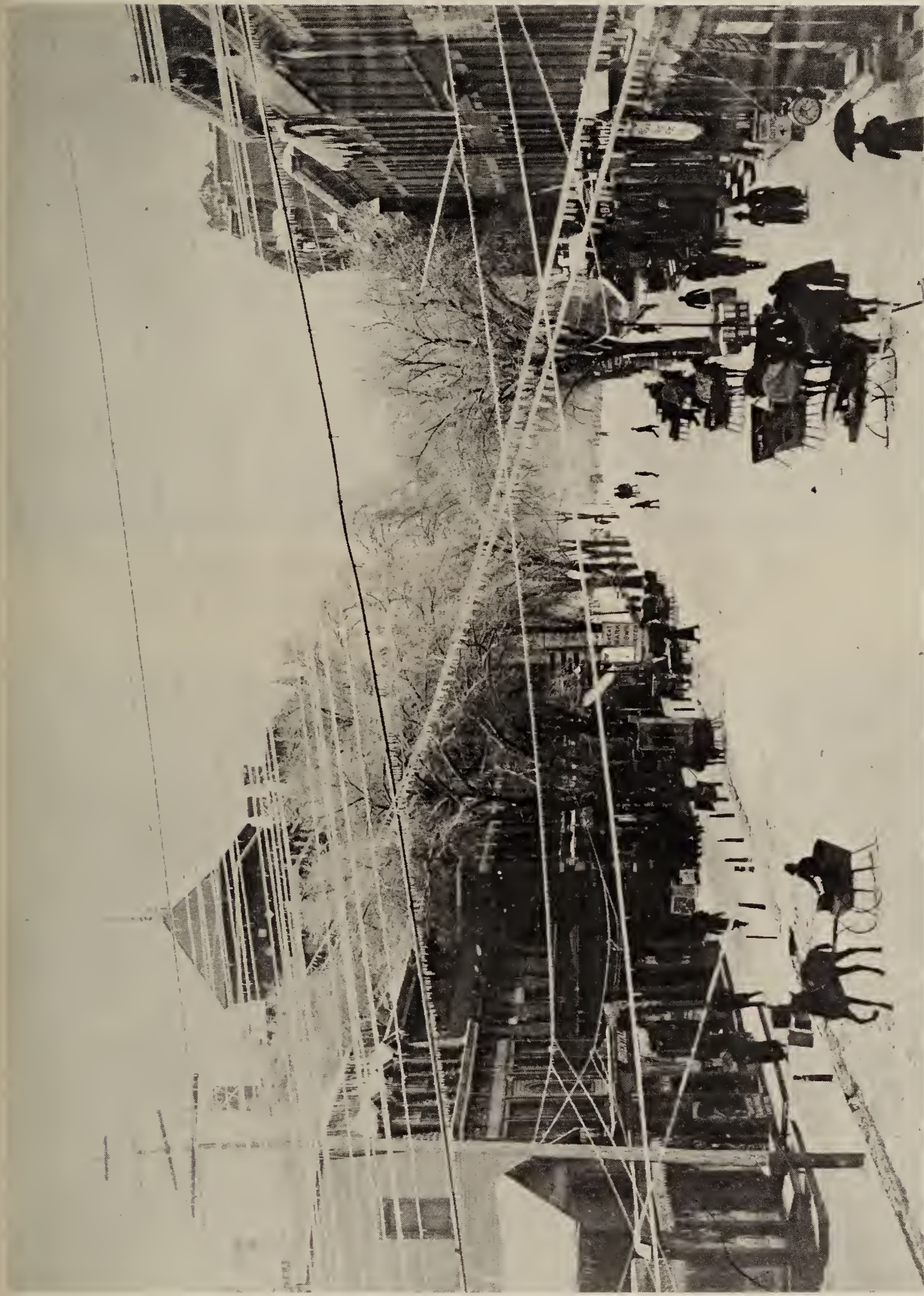
The second golf course was in Bradley Park, a nine-hole layout which was in use for a dozen years or more. The former clubhouse is still standing.

The Highland Country Club in Westfield was built in 1915. In its early days, the membership was divided between Meriden and Middletown residents. But the Middletown members withdrew to found their own course in Cromwell, and the burden of supporting the club eventually became too heavy for the Meriden membership. The 18-hole course, a most picturesque layout, was owned by the Wilcox Realty Company, which also owned the clubhouse. After the club disbanded in the 30's, the course was allowed to revert to its natural state, and few traces of it remain. During World War II, the clubhouse was converted into apartments for war housing. It was demolished after the war.

But golf was an exercise for the few during its early period. The majority of residents took their exercise in other ways, including baseball. Many baseball teams were promoted here, and some excellent players were developed. Thomas L. Reilly, mayor at the time of the Centennial, and Cornelius J. Danaher, when he was an aggressive young attorney, were two ardent promoters of the sport.

In Meriden and near its outskirts were several popular amusement resorts. Hemlock Grove and Terrace Garden drew crowds in the summer evenings and over the week ends. But Hanover Park, offering a greater variety of pastimes and more space in which to indulge them, was the principal center of attraction. There was a merry-go-round, with a double circle of animals, almost life-size, and a mechanical source of music, powered by





Winter Scene on Colony Street, circa 1890





Meriden Freight Depot and engine in the 1860's



Meriden, Cromwell & Waterbury Railway Locomotive





The Meriden House after the Blizzard of 1888  
 Corner of Colony and West Main Streets



Locomotive at Meriden Railroad Station, same storm





Meriden's Railroad Plaza in 1956





Corner East Main and State Streets  
when location was known as "Paddock's Corner"



Meriden's Business Center





"The Loop" before 1880  
Perkins Street, looking east. Crown Street in background



Parade on East Main Street in the 90's





Meriden Y.M.C.A. on Colony Street  
Building stood on present site of Boynton's, Inc.



Y.M.C.A. Clubhouse and Tennis Courts  
Off Lincoln Street, early in this century





Looking south from the corner of Church Street, about 1885



steam, in the center of the ring. After the park had been dismantled, one of the big lions from the carousel was borrowed by the Meriden Lions Club and used for the crowning piece on its float in the Tercentenary Parade of 1935.

Vaudeville acts, balloon ascensions, exhibits of various kinds were weekly features at Hanover Park. Some fast baseball games were played on the adjacent ball field. In one of these games, on April 4, 1890, the New York world's champions met the Meriden Resolutes, a semi-pro team made up of local stars. There were many others.

Hanover Park, which comprised 30 acres, could also boast of its boating facilities. The boat house near the pavilion housed 36 rowboats and a naphtha launch in 1895. The sail around the lake and up the Quinnipiac River on this launch, the "Amelia," was available at the price of one dime per passenger.

Roller skating and dancing in the Casino were other diversions. With its numerous concessions in action, the place looked like a small section of Savin Rock. But there were wide lawns and big trees to shelter the families which spread out basket picnics in the shade. The electric cars brought them in swarms when the weather was favorable. Every seat was crowded with adults and youngsters, and some perched precariously on the running boards, where they impeded the progress of the conductor as he edged his way along to collect fares. Smokers occupied the last seat in the car or the rear platform.

The styles in dress, for both men and women, were rather elaborate in this period. In 1890, a fashion article in the *Meriden Journal* stated:

"The girl of the year will be shaped in a new way. She will have knees. To make knees, a woman has only one resort, which is tying back the dress around the figure just at the line of the knees. If you want to get yourself up to look exactly like the extremely up-to-date girl of the year, begin at your underwear and have it shaped as tightly to your figure as possible. If necessary, wear tights. Have the dress fitted closely around the hips, and have it begin to flare just below the belt in the back. Have the flare set out like a great fan, taking care there is no fullness at the sides."

Many seasons were to pass before skirts would creep upward to the knee line and even above — in the "flapper" fashions of the turbulent 20's. The pancake hat, the peach basket hat, the wide-

brimmed sailor hat, the pompadour stuffed with a "rat," the Princess gown, the sheath gown and many other vagaries of style were to come and go. The snapshots in Meriden family albums would show a long procession of these styles, all of which appear strange to the modern eye — until they are revived by some couturier claiming an "original" creation.

But the men of the 90's had their vanities, too.

To quote from *The Journal* of December 7, 1895:

"Is there a break in the front crease of your trousers just above the shoe tops? Well, there should be. Notice the next dozen well-dressed men you meet. If the break is there, they are not only well dressed but correctly dressed, so far as their trousers go. This year's derby has a full crown, brim of medium width and well curled. A silk hat should always be worn with the Prince Albert coat, and of course with full dress. The cutaway is still the thing for business. New styles in cutaways are often worn with waistcoats of contrasting material. The new topcoats are in box effects — very striking."

Meriden business and professional men were careful about their dress. Bankers, lawyers, and doctors wore somber black or gray, but the young bloods of the city broke out in checks and plaids. The derby hat crowned two men out of three during the colder months. The others wore caps. Hard straw hats with wide brims were affected, especially by the younger men, after the weather turned warm. No man went without a hat. Nearly every man had some sort of facial adornment in the form of whiskers. Those without beards grew moustaches trained in handle-bar shapes or allowed to droop at the sides of the mouth. Few moustaches were closely trimmed. Barber shops displayed rows of shaving mugs which were the individual property of their regular customers. The mutton-chop whisker, edging down the cheek, was the special tag of the banker, and at least one Meriden banker sported this type of whisker until his death after the close of World War I.

Just as a fast sports car today is a possession for the young in heart, so the fast trotting horse was a property for men with sporting blood and youthful spirit before the automobile came along. During the winters, when there was good sleighing, many a trotting duel took place on the wider streets, some of them spur-of-the-moment affairs; others arranged to draw out side bets.



During the summer, such activities were transferred to the old trotting park at the north end, near Bailey Avenue. Traces of this layout may still be observed from the air according to persons who have flown over it recently.

Adjacent to the track were the fair grounds, where annual fairs were held for many years. The Connecticut Agricultural Society purchased the property, off Kensington Avenue, in 1890. But the fairs began to wane in popularity not long after that, and were discontinued in 1895.

During the Centennial in 1906, the trotting park was sold by the Meriden Park Company to Albert N. Butler and Leonard Suzio for about \$10,000. The purchasers said they intended to subdivide the 56 acres of land, between Kensington and Bailey Avenues, into building lots. They stated also that the building on high land near the grandstand would be retained as a clubhouse to be rented for socials and outings. Much of the tract has been built over, but the structure which once housed agricultural exhibits, baked goods and fancy work, entered in competition for prizes, is no longer standing.

The spaciousness characteristic of the era distinguished the homes which were built by men of substance, and even those in the middle income brackets were able to erect houses of eight rooms or more. The dwelling of the average family was a sprawling affair, with broad verandahs and bay windows on the sides. Usually, there was a cupola to rise about the roof line, and a port-cochere extending over the carriage drive. Inside, the instincts of the period for over-elaborate decoration were given full scope. Furniture in ungainly shapes crowded the living room. Dark draperies hung beside the windows, with lace curtains at the sash. Antimacassars on the backs of chairs caught the pomade which might rub off the head of the over-barbered man. Whatnots, covered with sea shells, little porcelain figurines, and curios of all kinds stood in the corner. The hearth was flanked with screens hand-painted by mother or one of the girls. A French ormolu clock, covered with a glass dome, probably stood on the mantel. The wallpaper might be dark green or red. The woodwork was always dark, and generally of mahogany, cherry, stained oak or black walnut. In such sombre rooms, the life of the family was by no means gloomy or dull, for there were all sorts of parlor diversions.

Musical evenings, when everyone gathered around the Wilcox & White "pneumatic symphony" or self-playing organ, occurred often. These organs, a much-prized possession in many Meriden homes, were a local product. They could be played by hand, or a perforated paper roll could be run through the mechanism to produce "the most intricate and beautiful music without touching the fingers to the keys." The player piano was a later development of the same company in its factory on Cambridge Street and was manufactured until the concern finally disbanded. The Aeolian Company, at Tremont and Cambridge Streets, also made players and went into the phonograph record business in its later operations here. The parlor organs and player pianos were gradually displaced by the phonograph which, in turn, suffered a decline with the advent of radio broadcasting.

Meriden homes could be and often were well equipped with local products before the dawn of the new century: silverware from Meriden Britannia; lamps and lighting fixtures from a number of companies, including the Miller Company, the Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Company, the Handel Company, the Meriden Bronze Company; table knives and forks from the Meriden Cutlery Company; porcelain and glass novelties from the C. F. Monroe Company; nickel silver specialties from the E. A. Bliss Company; cut glassware from the J. D. Bergen Company or T. Niland & Co.; silver-plated napkin rings and salts and peppers made by Wilbur B. Hall. Some of these names have been all but forgotten, but they represented manufacturers important in the Meriden of that day.

Meriden had its share of total abstainers, whose lips never touched anything stronger than coffee or tea, but there were also plenty of families which served beer and wine sold through local enterprise. The Meriden Brewing Company, an affiliate of the Connecticut Breweries Company, produced large quantities of beer in its plant on South Colony Street, abutting on the line of the Consolidated Railroad. It had a capacity of 100,000 barrels a year. Its "Golden Pale Ale" and "Pale Extra Lager" were in large demand in the 90's, but the business lapsed later. Attempts were made to revive it at different periods, but the old brewery finally fell into disuse for its original purpose. E. J. Burke's tire recapping plant occupies part of the old buildings.

The California Wine Company, operated by J. A. McHugh



in 1894, sold "real, pure and unadulterated California wines such as are often purchased by physicians for medical purposes." But it may be assumed that a doctor's prescription was unnecessary to obtain them here.

Distilled liquors were likely to be kept out of sight in Meriden homes of this period, for the cocktail before dinner had not become an institution, and young people were never allowed to partake. The man of the family, if he wanted to "wet his whistle," as the saying went, had his choice of a large number of saloons, or could drop in at his club. The old Winthrop bar was always well patronized in the late afternoon, when businessmen gathered there on their way home.

There was practically no "night life." The earliest sign of it was at the cafe operated by Claude Terrell on Colony Street, in the building which formerly housed Liggett's Drug Store. The Ponselle sisters were entertainers there for a brief period some years before Rosa took the path to stardom with the Metropolitan Opera Company.

This chapter should not be concluded without reference to a strange character who roamed these parts in the 70's and 80's. He was known universally as the "Old Leather Man," and never divulged his real name. His garments were fashioned entirely of leather, tailored by himself, and much patched to hold them together. Wherever he stopped, people were glad to feed him and give him a lodging in some barn or shed. Never did he utter a word, and the question as to whether he was dumb has never been answered. There were numerous explanations of his garb and behavior, some of them fantastic. His habitual itinerary covered many parts of the state, and many feature stories have been written about him. He died of exposure during a winter storm in a barn in upper New York state.

# The Century Turns

WHETHER OR not there is truth in the old saying that the first hundred years are the hardest, Meriden emerged from its first century as a separate community with few scars from its worst experiences and a rugged constitution that had proved itself able to survive every test.

Its city government was well ordered and ran smoothly. Its manufactures were thriving, and Meriden products were favorably known throughout the world. Its people had proved themselves industrious and thrifty. The business district was spreading out, and stores offered a reasonable variety of merchandise. The principal streets had been improved with new paving. Street lighting had been greatly extended. Railroad and street transportation facilities were even better, in some respects, than at present, and there was a network of electric lines to nearby communities. The school system did not suffer by comparison with the systems of other cities near Meriden's size. Banks were strong and able to respond to the financial demands of growing business and industry. There was no problem of unemployment.

The time had come for the city to review its past and take stock of its present while sending out feelers for the future. It was the psychological moment for a celebration that would give an opportunity for a display of civic pride and call attention to local achievements. The occasion was ready-made, just as at present, for in 1906 one hundred years could be counted since the first town meeting.

The Centennial was a masterpiece of organization, so well constructed that the group which planned the Sesquicentennial for the current year was able to draw valuable hints from the planning done 50 years ago. At least a year was devoted to arranging the details. Invitations were sent far and wide to reach former residents.

When the period of the celebration arrived, June 9 to 16, the town was filled to overflowing with visitors. Hotels and boarding



houses were packed. Private homes opened their doors to take in guests, many of whom came not for just a day or two but for the entire week.

Factories closed at noon on June 9, to remain closed for the duration of the observance. Main Street, east and west, Colony Street, State Street, Pratt Street, and many residential streets were decorated lavishly. Store fronts wore red, white and blue bunting, which draped from the roofs and framed every window. Bands were so numerous that the air was filled with music nearly all day long. Small boys ran themselves out of breath trying to keep up with the parades. It was a holiday time for all, but there were serious moments, too.

The churches conducted special services to open the week.

The historical side of the occasion was amply presented in addresses by those who knew it best. Incorporation Day, which wound up the week, was marked by a reproduction of the first town meeting. The late Sherman F. Johnson was the author of the script, which was based on the record of that historic event, so far as it could be pieced together from old documents.

By authority of the general committee, "*A Century of Meriden*" was published as an official souvenir of the Centennial. The book was divided into three parts, each fully indexed. The early history of the town was written by George Munson Curtis. The remaining content was compiled by C. Bancroft Gillespie. A portion of the receipts from this volume, which was widely sold, helped to defray the expenses of the celebration. Fifty years later, there are still occasional demands for copies, but few who possess the book can be persuaded to relinquish it.

Another book issued at the time was entitled "*Meriden's Centennial Celebration*." In 400 pages, it contained a full account of the occasion and many photographs.

Although a special town meeting had appropriated \$5,000 to defray expenses, the revenue received from other sources made it unnecessary to draw more than \$600 from this fund. The general committee had more than \$16,500 at its disposal to pay for the event.

There were carnival aspects to the affair which brought in large sums for the special licenses issued to vendors.

The sports program was almost continuous, with ball games, a golf tournament and racing at the old trotting park, with field

events at the adjacent fair grounds.

An industrial exposition was held at Hanover Park, where there were also evening band concerts and displays of fireworks.

Several state conventions were held here during the week, including the Connecticut Bankers' Association at the Home Club, at which ex-Governor Abiram Chamberlain, president of the association and also president of the Home National Bank presided.

On "Labor's Big Day," Wednesday, June 13, a mammoth street parade was held, in which dozens of handsome floats were entered. Thousands of labor union members took part.

Meriden's veterans of the Civil War, although aging, were still vigorous. They were hosts for the Department of Connecticut Grand Army encampment here on two days of the celebration.

On another day, two large parades were held: one by the 32 drum corps in the Connecticut Fifers' and Drummers' Association; the other by the Second Connecticut Regiment of the National Guard. The drummers began marching shortly after daybreak, and were still marching at the noon hour. The United Spanish War Veterans also held an encampment here, extending over two days.

Wallingford's place in connection with Meriden's early history was not forgotten. One day of the affair was set aside as Wallingford Day. The Putnam Phalanx of Hartford came here to do honor to the occasion, with its members in their ceremonial uniforms carrying out the colonial tradition. They marched up the hill to the city hall singing the song of the noble Duke of York, and carrying flintlock muskets, each weighing eleven and one-half pounds.

The Colonial Ball was held that evening, and proved one of the most spectacular features of the entire celebration.

Meriden's Centennial attracted wide attention and received favorable editorial comment in newspapers throughout the state. It was so successful that there was serious discussion of the proposal that the city hold some sort of public celebration annually to proclaim its progress. Before a year passed, this proposal had been forgotten. Other matters were more pressing. But memories of the Centennial lingered with those who were here when it was held, and older residents still like to recall it.



# The Automobile Age

THE AUTOMOBILE Age had barely begun when the current century was ushered in. There were only two cars in Meriden in 1900: one, an Olds runabout owned by Wallace F. Bowe of A. Bowe & Son; the other, a steam-powered car, make unidentified, belonging to Dr. H. L. Patzold, a dentist.

But the urge to own an automobile spread rapidly. In 1903, there were 38 cars registered here. It was the custom of the state at that time to issue numbers to the possessors of motor vehicles and let them make their own number plates. Some used slabs of wood, others patent leather with brass figures, or painted oilcloth with a stiff backing.

Three years later, at the time of the Centennial, there were enough new cars to make an impressive showing in the street parade. Some of them cost as much as \$7,500, and the average cost was more than half that sum. First prize for the most handsomely decorated car went to the late Dr. F. L. Murdock, dentist, for his "big Thomas car," covered with a blanket of flowers arching above the heads of the passengers.

Among the early dealers were Wilbur F. Parker, agent for the Thomas "Flyer" and Thomas "40," and Arthur Meeks, who handled several makes including the Cadillac "one lunger."

The purchase of an automobile was considered real news in those days, and sales were reported regularly in the press.

The demand for cars grew each year, and more and more businessmen joined the ranks of automobile dealers. Some of them had gained mechanical experience tinkering with bicycles.

The Meriden Auto Station is, by long odds, the oldest agency in the city. It was founded by Adam Englehart, and is still conducted by his son Leon J. Englehart. The original garage was where the Connecticut Light & Power Company building stands today. Later in the Yost Block, it was moved finally to 231 West Main Street. For most of these years, it has handled the same make of car — the Buick.

John F. Miller engaged in business in 1911, handling the

air-cooled Franklin, and was still selling Franklins when the company went out of business about 1934.

F. N. Hastings was another early dealer, representing the Oakland car. His garage was in the rear of his home on Griswold Street.

Charles H. Cheeney began to sell Studebakers in 1916, and was one of the earliest Chevrolet dealers.

There were numerous others in the period just before and just after World War I. The first great line-up of local dealers occurred in 1922 when the first automobile show in Meriden was presented at the New Departure plant shortly before it opened for production. After that year, shows were staged annually for a long period at the state armory. The incentive to hold them began to disappear when most dealers opened showrooms of their own, where they could display a variety of models.

Scores of makes of automobiles have been handled in Meriden during the last 50 years, and the names of many would be remembered only by older residents who knew what it was to fumble through a tool kit while trying to make repairs on the road, or to change one of the old clincher tires under similar conditions.

Among the older agencies listed today is Gilmartin Motor Sales Corp., Dodge and Plymouth, founded by the late John Gilmartin in partnership with the late John F. Day, as Gilmartin & Day, and now conducted by John Gilmartin, Jr. The garage at 127 Colony Street was built in 1910. John J. Scanlon, now handling Chrysler and Plymouth at 34 Miller Street, began business in 1924. Max's Automotive Service, DeSoto, Plymouth, at 172 West Main Street, established 1933, is owned by Max Katz, whose connection with the automobile business began much earlier when he was a mechanic for Charles H. Cheeney.

The Alderman Motor Co., 65 Cook Avenue, Oldsmobile and Cadillac, began business in 1923 at the corner of Cook Avenue and Hanover Street, and later was on Pratt Street before moving to the present quarters. The Ford agency of D. W. Flint, Inc. was once in the same building. Later, the agency passed to Budd Motors and finally to Danaher Bros., whose garage is on Parker Avenue.

Other automobile dealerships here have much briefer histories.



### Theaters, Past and Present

THE CENTENNIAL celebration was handicapped in one respect. Arrangements had been made to hold a number of the most important gatherings in the Meriden Theater on Church Street, more generally known, through long tradition, as the Delavan Opera House. But the old theater, which was practically the only place of theatrical entertainment here for a quarter of a century, burned down on March 27, 1906, forcing a revision of all the plans to connect it with the program less than three months away.

The building so inconveniently destroyed had once housed religious services. It was erected by the First Congregational Society in 1847, when a portion of the membership of the uptown church broke away to establish a new place of worship downtown. It was used continuously as a church until 1879, when the last communion was held on March 2. Then located at the corner of Church and Colony Streets, the building was moved to the rear and turned to face Church Street. The present First Congregational Church on Colony Street was constructed at that time, and the former church was purchased by Horace Wilcox. After the removal of the edifice, he proceeded to erect the Wilcox Block on the corner site. Meanwhile, the conversion of the church into a theater proceeded, and the work was finished in time for the scheduled opening performance on December 4, 1879. The first play presented was "Our Bachelors," produced by Robinson & Crane. It was written by Joseph Bradford, brother-in-law of J. S. Norton, cashier of the Home National Bank. Charles S. Perkins, later to fill the same position and to rise to the presidency of the bank, was appointed manager of the theater by Mr. Wilcox. Mr. Perkins remained as manager through the first season, but was replaced the following year by Thomas Delavan. Delavan did not remain long in charge. He left town. But his wife succeeded him and directed the theater until the summer of 1901, when Jean Jacques, who conducted a theater in Waterbury, took over the lease. The Jacques management lasted until 1904. Ira W. Jackson and William D. Reed of New London then assumed the lease,

changed the name to the Meriden Theater, and ran it until it burned.

Many of the great and the near-great actors of the nineteenth century played at the Delavan Opera House during its heyday. The old productions required licenses, and records at the city hall contain the illustrious names of Edwin Booth, E. H. Sothern, Joseph Jefferson, Mary Anderson, Fanny Davenport, Modjeska, Januschak, Emma Abbott, Pat Rooney, Sr., Sol Smith Russell, Denman Thompson and Buffalo Bill.

The mainstay of the old theater was the "stock company." A long succession of these companies performed such standard plays of the period as "East Lynn," "Two Orphans," "Only a Farmer's Daughter," "Pirates of Penzance," "The Old Homestead" made popular by Denman Thompson, "Rip Van Winkle" with Joseph Jefferson in the title role, "The Celebrated Case," "Bess, the Waif," "Peck's Bad Boy," "Black Flag," "Power of Money," "Wages of Sin," "The Black Crook," and many more.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin," based on the famous book by Harriet Beecher Stowe, was presented on numerous occasions.

Minstrel performances were frequent attractions, always preceded by a "mammoth street parade."

Light opera companies with casts of 40 to 50 persons came here often to present the equivalent of today's musical comedies.

After Mrs. Delavan gave up the lease in 1901, the character of the shows began to change. Under Jackson and Reed, a decline in attendance was noticeable, but by then motion pictures had begun to offer some competition. The Meriden Theater began to show movies to fill in the week's bill about a year before it burned. The management promised to build a new theater, but could not obtain the backing necessary for the venture.

Only a few traces remain of this once celebrated playhouse, to be seen by those who look for them carefully. The entrance, now boarded up, was at the east end of the Horton Printing Company building. An archway of brownstone marks the spot. A small area of much-worn marble flags may be noticed just inside the archway. Near the ceiling are traces of ornamental iron work in relief, the material which lined the lobby. Through this entrance, theatergoers passed directly back to the box office and from there to the auditorium at the rear. A yard, partially enclosed by small garages, occupies the space where the audiences were



seated. The stage was at the west end of the auditorium, near the retaining wall which rises to the municipal parking lot. Entrance to the top balcony was gained by means of a door on the alley which runs between the printing company's building and the rear of the Wilcox Block.

At the corner of Church Street and High School Avenue stood Austin's livery stable, where Mrs. Delavan kept the horse which drew her light buggy and the heavier wagon used for bill-posting excursions, and to convey scenery for the performances from the railroad station to the theater. The wagon was backed up to an alleyway which led from Church Street, and from there was unloaded into a storage room beside the stage. The stage entrance was beside this passage.

Meriden missed the opera house and the types of entertainment which had been presented there. Not long after the fire, the Meriden Board of Trade, predecessor of the Chamber of Commerce, started a movement to gain backing for a new theater. Early in 1907, this effort was successful, for S. Z. Poli of New Haven, who had already started a chain of theaters in New England, told a local committee, headed by C. H. Tredennick, that he would invest capital if a company could be formed to erect a theater here, taking a long term lease on the house and guaranteeing a rental that would give investors a good return on their money. The Meriden Theater Company was organized, with a capital of \$100,000, and C. W. Cahill, owner of the Cahill Block, agreed to build the theater in the rear of this property, with a lobby opening from East Main Street. On August 17, 1907, the first brick of the new theater was laid by Mayor Thomas L. Reilly.

The theater had 1,700 seats, originally, on main floor and first and second balconies. The stage was 40 feet deep and the proscenium arch measured 36 x 27 feet. The decorations were ornate and the appointments impressive. Few theaters in New England could match it at that period, and to it some of the best legitimate attractions in the country were brought during its earlier period. But even before World War I the competition of motion pictures was making it unprofitable to send the better class of road companies on tour into the smaller cities. Vaudeville and variety shows were still in the ascendant. The Poli Theater compromised by booking road shows occasionally while concen-

trating, through most of the season, on combination programs of vaudeville and motion pictures. By that time, the S. Z. Poli chain had access to the best acts in vaudeville. The bills changed twice and sometimes three times weekly, and the house was well filled throughout the fall and winter.

In 1920, Mr. Cahill offered \$100,000 for the theater, its site, and the equipment, and the offer was accepted by the directors of the Meriden Theater Company, which then proceeded to disband.

After the collapse of vaudeville, due mainly to the advent of movies with sound, the Poli Theater became a motion picture house entirely, except for occasional performances by amateurs, such as the annual Charity Club show and the Fellowcraft Minstrels, presented there for a number of years.

In 1928, the theater lease was taken over by the Loew interests, combined with what was left of the original Poli enterprise.

The death sentence for the 45-year-old theater, which had often served for community gatherings, such as war bond rallies during World War I, came in 1952, when William J. Cahill, Jr., mayor at that time, announced that the building would be razed. It was torn down in 1953.

The Loew Poli Palace Theater on West Main Street is the successor to a theatrical enterprise which began in 1921, when the late Esidor Derecktor signed a contract with the Sutherland Construction Company of St. Louis to construct a theater in the rear of a business block which he owned. The St. Louis concern agreed to put up the building for \$225,000 and to sign a lease for a term of 50 years. Some local capital, in addition to that furnished by Mr. Derecktor, had been attracted to the venture, and the enterprise was named the Community Playhouse. Its life under these auspices was short. Even before the first year was out, it was apparent that mistakes had been made, both in the design of the theater and in its management. Built all on one floor, with no balconies, the acoustical properties of the auditorium were found to be deficient. Much space was wasted in the lobby, where a fountain played. Some big names of the theatrical world had been featured in occasional legitimate productions there, but the general run of attractions brought poor to only fair attendance. In 1922, Patrick F. McMahon, a former resident of Meriden, and Nathan and Samuel Derecktor bought practically all of the stock



in the company, and took full control. But their reign was also short.

The Sutherland Construction Company was still in the picture, through the arrangements made originally, and it had the deciding voice. The Community Playhouse was sold in 1924 to the S. Z. Poli Theatrical Enterprises. Mr. Poli himself was still active. The move gave him control of two theaters in Meriden, for he was still operating the older house.

Although still young, the Community Playhouse was already showing signs of wear, and Mr. Poli gave orders for its entire renovation and for alterations to improve the arrangement and acoustics. This work was completed, and the theater, entirely changed in the interior, was opened for the first performance on August 11, 1924, rechristened the Meriden Poli Palace.

Due to a combination between the Fox and Poli interests, the name was again changed in 1930, when the theater became known as the Fox-Poli Palace. Later the Fox name was dropped, after a financial reorganization which brought the famous theatrical name of Loew into the picture, and placed it beside the name of Poli, which was equally well known in New England.

The Loew Poli Palace Theater has continued the successful policies which were inaugurated after the Community Playhouse venture failed. M-G-M productions are featured, but a wide range of selections from Hollywood's best is offered throughout the year.

The Capitol Theater on Grove Street is strictly a local enterprise. Originally called the Life Theater, the name was changed to its present form in 1930, when J. M. Ricci, owner of the property, decided to operate the business, and placed his son Leo Ricci in charge. During the spring and summer of that year, the theater was enlarged and entirely renovated. It underwent further alterations in 1937. While they were in progress, the staff was moved to the East Main Street Poli Theater, and the programs were presented there. The personnel returned to the Capitol as soon as the work was completed, and the house was reopened December 17, 1937. Since then, it has been completely renovated several times. In 1950, an addition was built, measuring 103 feet in depth, 35 feet wide at the front and 22 feet wide in the rear, to provide a new entrance and a new lounge. Air conditioning was

also installed. Leo Ricci has continued to manage the theater since 1930.

The latest addition to Meriden's theatrical enterprises is the Meriden Theater on South Broad Street, near the Wallingford town line. It was constructed on a portion of the old Watrous farm. Three New Britain men, Nick Kounaris, A. Tolles, and George Ulysses were originally involved, but there have been changes in ownership since. The structure was designed to seat from 950 to 1,000 persons in an air-conditioned auditorium. It was completed in 1949.

There have been other theaters in Meriden since motion pictures became a popular form of public entertainment. Among them were the Star, Bijou, and Crystal which were opened in the period between 1910 and 1920. All these were small movie houses. For a time, an open-air theater was in operation on Church Street, during the summers. Known as the Air Dome, it was under the same ownership and management as the Crystal Theater on Colony Street, opposite the Winthrop Hotel. Many older residents had their first introduction to the movies in these tiny theaters, which went out of business many years ago.

Meriden is the home city of many who rose to become celebrities in the world of entertainment. Among them, none achieved greater fame than Rosa Ponselle, born Rosa Ponzillo, often rated as the finest dramatic soprano ever to join the Metropolitan Opera Company. At the height of her career in the 20's, she sang with Enrico Caruso, Gigli, and other stars who have never been excelled. Her sister, Carmela, was well known as an opera and concert singer. Both sisters, when in their teens, sang between movie reels at the old Star Theater on West Main Street, and appeared frequently before various local organizations.

George Sklar, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ezak Sklar of this city, began his successful career as a playwright when he was still in Yale University. He has written a long succession of plays and novels and adaptations for the screen. In some of his books, a Meriden background was recognizable.

In the field of vaudeville, when it was in its prime, Meriden produced many headliners of their day, among them Milton Bros., acrobats; Vesta and Teddy Wentworth; Jack and Dennis Haggerty and their trained dog; the Savoy's, another dog act; Kennedy & Kramer, famous dance team, of whom the survivor, James



Kennedy, is still in Meriden and connected with the circulation department of the Record-Journal; Eddie DeVoe, contortionist; John Potts, celebrated clown; Walter Brasyl, dancer with Primrose Minstrels; Harry Bolden and Hattie Sharp, singing and piano; Eddie Dowling, with Dockstader's Minstrels; Charles Nellis, Jr. with Guy Bros. Minstrels; Lee Harrissier Bros., with Guy Bros.; Bill Dunham, singer; Mike Carron, acrobat; Eddie Garvey of Girard & Garvey; Morris Slater, singer with Guy Bros.; Freddie Miller, dancer; and George Rollins, dancer. LeRoi McCafferty, well-known magician of the "big time" made his home here for many years.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

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### Sports Celebrities

MERIDEN'S INTEREST in all forms of sports has always been keen. Many celebrities of the sports world have been born and bred in Meriden, and others, equally famous have become local citizens by adoption. Space does not permit the enumeration of all the greater and lesser stars who have lived here at one stage or another of their careers, but a few of special importance may be mentioned.

There was the beloved Connie Mack who came to Meriden about 1884 as a lanky young catcher, signed by a local promoter also known as Connie. Cornelius J. Danaher, then a youthful attorney with a flair for arranging sports events, picked Cornelius McGillicuddy to play on the Meriden team which was giving a run to many teams of the state in games at the old trotting park off Kensington Avenue. Both Connies made good in their separate ways. Connie Mack hit a triple the first time at bat. He later caught in Hartford and graduated to Philadelphia, where he rose to fame as manager and principal owner of the Philadelphia Athletics. Mack's original sponsor, Connie Danaher, gained distinction as Connecticut's Labor Commissioner and in his long career before the bar. He is the father of former Mayor Francis R. Danaher and of John A. Danaher, who was elected U. S. senator in 1938. At that time another Meriden man, the late Francis T. Maloney, was also in the U. S. Senate. John Danaher is now judge of the U. S. Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia.

Jack Barry, born in Meriden in 1887, starred in sports at Meriden High School and later at Holy Cross. He was signed by Connie Mack directly from the Holy Cross campus in 1908 as regular shortstop, and became an integral part of the illustrious "\$100,000 infield" which included Stuffy McInnis, Eddie Collins, and "Home Run" Baker. When the quartet was disbanded, Barry went to the Red Sox, and helped to spark the winning of pennants in 1915 and 1916. He managed Boston to second place in 1917. At present he is regarded as one of the nation's top



coaches at Holy Cross.

Sam Babcock, outstanding amateur and semi-pro hockey player, has turned to officiating, and is now in his 16th year as National Hockey League linesman. He is the oldest official in NHL in term of service.

Lois Felix, Meriden tennis star, learned the game in Brookside Park, in the rear of her home. She became local, state, and New England champion without benefit of formal coaching. Miss Felix participated in the Nationals at Forest Hills and also played at Wimbledon in England. She was once ranked eighth nationally in singles by the U. S. Lawn Tennis Association and was rated fifth nationally in doubles.

Julius Woronick, Meriden's No. 1 professional wrestler, appeared under the name of the Great Mephisto. He won the recognized light heavyweight world's wrestling championship in the early 1930's, and is still in competition. In Canada he is a special favorite.

"Big Ed" Walsh, born in 1881 in Plains, Pa., came to Meriden when he was 21, and played for this city in the old Connecticut League. During his first year in Meriden (1902) he won 15 and lost 5. The White Sox of the American League bought him from Newark after he had compiled a 9-5 record in 1903. In his first season with Chicago (1904) Walsh won 6, lost 3. Chicago paid \$750 for him, probably baseball's greatest bargain. He gained the height of his fame in 1908, when he won 40 games, lost 15, appeared in 66, struck out 269, walked only 56 and worked 464 innings. His top salary was \$3,500. He was named to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1946. His son, Young Ed, who seemed destined for a brilliant future in baseball, died in 1937.

Louis "Kid" Kaplan retired as undefeated featherweight champion of the world. He is regarded as one of the greatest of all time in his division. Nicknamed the "Meriden Buzzsaw," he won the title on Jan. 2, 1925 from Danny Kramer on a kayo in the eighth round. Kaplan began fighting in Meriden in 1921 and had nine bouts that year; six in Meriden, three in Hartford. He won all on decisions. His first fight was July 1, 1921 against Sammy Waltz, which he won in 12 rounds. He retired Feb. 23, 1933, three days after he lost a 10-round decision to Cocoa Kid in the New Haven Arena, a fight which did not cost him his title.

Harry Costello, regarded by many as the greatest football

player in the history of Georgetown University, was termed by "Pop" Warner, the famous coach of the Carlisle Indians, "for his inches, one of the finest players who ever lived." Joe Beecham, former West Point coach, said of Costello, "He's the best football player we had at West Point for as long as I can remember." He could punt, pass, run, and drop kick with equal facility. At Georgetown, he starred during the seasons 1910-1913.

Dennis McMahon, known all his life as "Dinny," was the manager of world's champion Kid Kaplan. He is one of the few to hold the coveted Gold Key awarded by Connecticut sports writers. He is now State Athletic Commissioner.

Walter Surowiecki, one of Meriden's all-time great bowlers, won the national singles bowling championship against thousands of the country's top keggers with 445.

Steve Carr, born before the era of television, was the best of his day in the light heavyweight division. He was undefeated in 1932 and 1934.

Ben Zajac, one of the city's finest basketball players, captained Meriden High to the state and New England championships in 1935. He became a successful basketball coach at Wilcox Tech.

In schoolboy sports, many interesting chapters have been written here. The three major sports, football, basketball, and baseball have dominated the scene at Meriden High School, while tennis, soccer, swimming, and golf have always been rated there as minor sports. The high school's greatest successes have been scored in football and basketball. The achievements of the 1916 and 1926 football teams and the 1934 and 1935 basketball teams are best remembered by the older graduates.

Coach Frank Barnikow, who served M. H. S. from 1926 to 1946 is credited with one of the best coaching records of the kind in the state. He gave the Red and Blue two state and New England championship basketball teams in 1934 and 1935, and the second unbeaten and untied football team in M. H. S. history in 1926.

Intersectional games were not taboo in high school sports in those days, and Meriden beat Nashua, N. H. in 1926, the first out-of-state journey ever taken by an M. H. S. eleven.

Meriden's first intersectional game was played earlier in the 20's, when Jimmie Fitzpatrick, a star on the first M. H. S. team ever to attain a perfect record, came here from Portland, Maine for a clash at Hanover Park which drew a crowd of 2,000.



The first paid coach at Meriden High School was Pat Meskell, who was appointed to coach football in 1917.

In recent years, Little League baseball and Junior League football have become popular in Meriden. A baseball park for the Little Leaguers was created on Britannia Street, where games are played throughout the season. Teams are uniformed and sponsored by local business concerns. Meriden in 1954 was the scene of sectional play-offs in Junior League football. In 1955, the Meriden "All Stars" were sent to Redondo Beach, Cal., for the play-offs there. The local eleven lost the big game by a close margin, but gained more ground than their opponents. The expenses of the trip were defrayed through local contributions.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

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### World War I

THE ASSASSINATION of an Austrian Archduke and his wife on June 28, 1914 was an event so remote from Meriden that none could have guessed its implications, so far as this city was concerned. But the deaths of Francis Ferdinand and the Duchess of Hohenberg led to conflict between Austria and Serbia. The rivalry of great European powers, already primed for war, soon burst into full flame. On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia, and against France on August 3. The German armies invaded Belgium on August 4. This is not the place to record the titanic struggle which raged up to the time the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917. But from that moment, Meriden was involved, along with the rest of the country.

Meriden companies of the National Guard had been seasoned a year in advance, when the border troubles with Mexico began in 1916. The State Armory here had been dedicated December 15, 1908, and the local guardsmen had received the standard peacetime training in the form of drills and maneuvers. But the Mexican border forays under the bandit general, Pancho Villa, had cost American lives, and Gen. John J. Pershing, with 12,000 troops, was sent into Mexico. On June 6, 1916, Meriden guardsmen were mobilized and sent to his support. On October 16 of that year, the local soldiers returned, and were ready when the next duty called.

There was a hard core of experienced men available to form the nucleus of the forces summoned from here as America's entry into World War I. When the break in diplomatic relations with Germany occurred on February 3, 1917, the National Guard was mobilized. Two days later, the local companies were on guard at the Westinghouse plant at the north end, where large defense contracts were being filled.

On March 8, there was full mobilization, and Companies I and L were sent to Bridgeport for guard duty on April 1 with the 3rd battalion of the 2nd Connecticut Infantry in anticipation of the declaration of war, which came only five days later. At that



time, Company I was in command of Capt. William H. Whitney, with John R. Feegel as 1st lieutenant and Company L was under Capt. Frank H. McGar, with Samuel Tyler as 1st lieutenant.

The Meriden soldiers served in Bridgeport until July 25, when they were moved to Yale Field in New Haven, where the 2nd Connecticut Regiment was assembled.

On August 25, the 2nd Connecticut Infantry became the 102nd U. S. Infantry of the 51st Brigade, 26th Division. Company L was increased to a strength of 250 men and six officers, with complements from Company L of the 1st Connecticut Infantry, Company K of the 1st Vermont Infantry and casualties from the 6th Massachusetts Infantry. Company I was undergoing much the same process.

The Meriden soldiers, with other units of the 102nd, entrained from New Haven for Montreal, Canada on September 14, and from there sailed to Europe. They landed at Liverpool, England on October 2, and moved by way of Southampton to Le Havre, France. On October 7, they arrived at Certilleaux, Vosges, and were part of the 1st Corps Reserve until February 6, 1918, when they were sent with other infantry units of the 26th Division to Chassemy Wood, Vailly, France, in the Chemin des Dames sector. The next transfer was to the American sector on the Toule front. They arrived in Ansauville on April 1. On July 3, they were drawn into the thick of the fighting in the sector around Chateau-Thierry. Following the Champagne, Marne, and Aisne-Marne operations, they were moved to Perrefette and Rupt en Woivre for the St. Mihiel offensive, which began September 5. After the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient, the men from Meriden were in the movement through Verdun to Bois des Ormonte for the closing engagements of the war, ended by the Armistice on November 11, 1918. After that, they were held in Army reserves near General Headquarters, Chaumont, until cleared for return to the United States. They sailed from Brest, France, on April 1, 1919, and arrived in Boston, April 7. The local units were demobilized at Camp Devens, Mass. on April 29.

The engagements in which Meriden soldiers took part were the gas attack at Pargny-Filain, March 17-18, 1918; Seicheprey-Toule front, April 20-21; Xivray-Marvoissin, Toule front, June 16; jump-off from Moresches for Chateau-Thierry counterattack, July 18, to Epieds Trugny Aug. 4; St. Mihiel operation from

Woevre to Vigneulles, September 12-13; Wadonville, Saulx and Marcheville, September 15-26 as diversion attacks and a feint at Metz to cover preparations for the Meuse-Argonne offensive; in the Meuse-Argonne offensive their assignment was to protect the right flank of the 1st American Army at Bois d'Ormonte October 16, and they helped to press the attack through to clear the enemy from this area and push him back from the last of his strongly entrenched positions.

The losses of Meriden men in the last phases of the war were heavy. Eighty-four names are inscribed on the World War I Memorial.

Throughout the war, the home front in Meriden was lending all possible assistance in the support of the fighting forces.

One of the first essentials here was a uniformed force to replace the National Guard in protecting war plants. On March 30, 1917, the state called for enlistments in the State Guard. Several companies were formed here, later reduced to two companies of infantry, and Major Joseph DeCantillon was placed in command of the Meriden battalion. Captain H. DeForest Lockwood, afterward promoted to major in the Medical Corps, formed an Ambulance Corps. He was one of those who had seen service with the National Guard at the Mexican border. A uniformed Motor Transport Corps of five battalions was organized, and Frank E. Sands was commissioned as major in command.

All of these companies drilled regularly at the State Army and engaged in maneuvers from time to time. As the war proceeded, many of the younger men in them became affiliated with the fighting forces, and older men filled up the gaps.

In the fall of 1917, the Meriden War Council was organized as an arm of the State Council of Defense.

Liberty Loan drives became frequent. The second such drive went over the top on October 27, 1917, the third in April 1918, the fourth a few months later, and the fifth in April 1919.

Shortages in various essential commodities began to appear in the fall of 1917, but the first real pinch occurred on January 18, 1918, when factories here had to close for five days because of lack of coal. It was an exceptionally severe winter, and many homes were without fuel on some of the worst days. Again, during the following August, deliveries of coal were reduced.

On September 21, 1917, for a period of about a month, "gasless



Sundays" were enforced, and no automobiles were allowed on the roads except for the most essential uses under permit. Newspapers had to be reduced in size to conserve newsprint.

On March 21, 1918, daylight saving went into effect for the first time.

On February 28, 1918, dispatches received here carried the first news that Meriden troops were engaged in action. On March 9, 1918, the machine gun company from Camp Devens entrained here.

Full war production in local plants was not achieved until the summer of 1918, although war materials were shipped, in some instances, in May.

Long before that time, Meriden had been almost stripped of its young men, except those who had received exemption from the draft because of physical defects or essential war service. The first registration day was on July 5, 1917, and the first draft came on July 20. The second registration day was held on September 12, 1918, embracing those who had reached the age of 21. On September 17, all female aliens were required to register. On September 16, 1918 the whole force of the Connecticut State Guard was ordered to New Haven for review.

Home front activities appeared on every side in which women, as well as men, took part. On May 8, 1918, a meeting of citizens decided to organize a War Chest, covering many of the local agencies which were taking part in war work. The drive was a great success, and the inspiration carried ten years into the future, when the Community Fund was formed.

The news of the Armistice broke prematurely, and was greeted with wild rejoicing, but the crowds reassembled in even greater number when the official announcement was published on November 11, 1918. A large parade wound through the city's principal streets.

On November 11, 1918, Mayor Henry T. King appointed a Committee of Ninety to arrange a welcome home for Meriden soldiers. The committee went to Boston the following April to meet the first arrivals from overseas.

A "Welcome Home" monument was erected on Winthrop Square to serve until the form of a permanent memorial could be decided upon. During the war, a board with an honor roll had been placed on this site, which was an open plot of land until

the present Colony Building was erected on it.

A long period was to ensue before Meriden's plans to honor its war dead matured. Organizations of World War I veterans were formed rapidly after the war, however, and took part in the deliberations. On March 19, 1920, Meriden Post No. 45, American Legion, sponsored a memorial service in the city hall auditorium to pay tribute to those who had lost their lives in the struggle. On that occasion, French awards to Meriden soldiers were presented, some of them posthumously. Lt. Robert Leconte represented the French High Command. Mayor Daniel J. Donovan spoke for the city, and Dr. David P. Smith, then commander of the Legion Post, opened the ceremonies.

The immortal Yankee Division, the 26th, in which so many Meriden men had served, was made up originally entirely of volunteers. When hostilities ceased, barely 15 per cent of them remained. To its credit were nearly 150 citations, and more than 7,000 of its men were cited individually for their bravery. Meriden soldiers had their full share of these honors, from their own country and from the French Government as well.



# World War I Memorial and Boulevard

THE COMMITTEE of Ninety, appointed by Mayor King, had as its first duty the task of arranging a suitable reception for the veterans, but it also looked forward to the time when the sacrifice of those who could not return would be suitably marked with a lasting memorial.

The committee voted on April 1, 1919 that any balance of funds remaining after paying the expenses of welcoming celebrations should be devoted to paying "part or the entire expense of a suitable bronze memorial or — the entire expense of suitable separate grave markers or monuments" in memory of the dead.

A canvass for funds resulted in donations of \$9,813.70. After paying for the welcome home exercises and the maintenance of a Soldiers and Sailors club room in Journal Hall, a balance of \$3,262.20 remained.

At the same time Mayor King appointed the Committee of Ninety, he appointed another committee "to inquire into and report to the people concerning a memorial to those who entered the service of their country from Meriden." This committee reported in favor of erecting a memorial building on the site of the Charles S. Palmer residence, later the home of P. T. Ives. This proposal did not meet with favor, and the smaller committee took no further action.

Another plan for a large stone with a bronze plate affixed, to stand at the southwest corner of the city hall was also rejected. A third proposal was rejected because the chosen site was that occupied by the G. A. R. monument to Civil War veterans.

Thomas L. Reilly, former mayor, moved that the council be requested to appropriate "as much as was necessary of \$25,000" for the erection of a memorial.

Additional suggestions for various forms of memorials and various sites were appearing frequently, but all fell flat, for one reason or another.

Six years had passed, and the city seemed to grow weary of argument. No further proposal appeared until May 1928, when the plan to make a portion of Broad Street into a Memorial Boulevard, and to place a monument at the intersection of Broad and East Main Streets was brought to the attention of the Chamber of Commerce by Lorenzo Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton had drawn plans to accompany his suggestion, and the Chamber's directors appointed a committee to take up the matter with Mayor Wales L. deBussy. The plans were submitted to the State Highway Department, which approved Mr. Hamilton's design.

Through further conferences between local and state officials, agreement was reached for the construction of Memorial Boulevard. The state was already committed to the repaving of Broad Street as a state highway, and consented to assume the cost of the strip on the east side of the dividing plot in the center of the boulevard, assessing the cost of the west side against the city. The state would also take and pay for any land needed to widen the southeast corner of East Main Street where it intersected with Broad Street, and the city agreed to acquire the land needed for improving the opposite corner, west of Broad Street. The residence of Daniel J. Donovan, which occupied the site where the old Central Tavern had stood, had been sold, and was to be removed to make room for a gasoline station. The new owners came to an agreement with the city which permitted the widening of this corner. Nothing further stood in the way of the proposed Memorial Boulevard, but the question of the monument was still unsettled.

On January 7, 1929, the council approved the appointment of a committee of five aldermen to be known as the World War I Memorial Committee, "whose duty it shall be to select a suitable memorial and site . . . said committee to have full powers to act in any manner in regard to this memorial."

Mayor deBussey appointed Mrs. Mildred Williams as chairman, Alderman Horace F. Doolittle, secretary, and Aldermen Castelow, Quinlan and Ficken. The committee's membership was later increased by the appointment of 36 other citizens. Additional sub-committees were appointed on site, ways and means, the memorial, publicity, dedication, and reception.

The site committee reported favorably on the Broad Street location, and on June 11, 1929, the general committee passed the



following vote:

“that Broad Street from the junction of East Main Street to the junction of Curtis and South Broad Streets be adopted as Memorial Boulevard and the site of the World War I Memorial, and that the memorial itself be placed as near the junction of East Main and Broad Streets as practical.”

The council gave the committee power to take the necessary steps. The ways and means sub-committee reported that the funds should be raised by general taxation and favored the laying of a one mill tax for the purpose. The Board of Apportionment and Taxation followed this recommendation by laying a half mill tax in 1930, with the understanding that the second half mill would be applied the following year.

The contract for the Broad Street route was let to the L. Suzio Construction Company of this city, and work was started on November 30, 1929 at the north end of the junction of Berlin Road and Broad Street. The roadway laid was 20 feet wide, of reinforced concrete eight inches thick. The second contract, with the same company, was signed June 17, 1930, and provided for the central or boulevard section and the cut-off at Yalesville leading to the old railroad underpass. The Southern New England Telephone Company placed an additional contract for underground conduits, and the city contracted for the laying of sewers. The state contracts amounted to nearly \$400,000, the telephone company's to \$220,000 and the sewer bill to \$5,200.

After inspection of many monuments and designs, the sub-committee on the form of the memorial recommended the design submitted by the Gorham Company of Providence. A model was exhibited, and the design was formally adopted. It was the work of sculptor Aristide B. Cianfarani.

Another decision was made that the names to go on the monument should be only those of the war dead, and another contract was made with the Gorham Company to erect a Roll of Honor on the section of the central parkway strip south of the monument. Later, it was proposed that a flagpole be erected nearby in honor of the Gold Star mothers, and a committee was appointed to investigate this plan.

The World War I monument consists of a granite column, surmounted by a bronze eagle and flanked at its base by four bronze statues representing the Doughboy, the Marine, the Sailor

and the Nurse. The granite column is decorated with stars and stripes, symbolizing the American flag. The eagle is conceived as lighting on the top of the column with a laurel wreath of Victory clutched in his talons. On the buttresses beneath each statue are inscribed the names of those who died in service. The buttress beneath the Doughboy, which faces down East Main Street, is inscribed:

“Dedicated to the Memory of Those from Meriden Who Made the Supreme Sacrifice in the Service of Their Country During the World War.”

There are four star-embellished bowls mounted on tripods which illuminate the monument at night. These tripods are mounted on heavy granite pedestals on which are inscribed the names of the battles in which the Meriden men participated. The extreme height of the monument from the street level is approximately 50 feet. The granite for the memorial was quarried at Barre, Vermont.

This striking monument was dedicated November 8, 1930 with ceremonies witnessed by thousands. The parade passed in review before Governor John H. Trumbull and Major General Clarence Edwards, commander of the Yankee Division. The reviewing stand was filled with scores of men and women prominent in all phases of the community's life.

Mrs. Mildred R. Williams, general chairman of the memorial committee, presented the memorial, which was accepted, after unveiling, by Mayor Francis T. Maloney on behalf of the city. General Edwards delivered the dedicatory address.

The monument and the boulevard, overlooked by the two historic white churches, constitute a scene which has probably been more admired than any other feature of the more thickly settled portions of Meriden. It is a scene which appeals at any time of day or night, and at any season of the year. The boulevard is illuminated by long rows of lights. When the churches are also illuminated, the sight is doubly impressive. It is best of all, perhaps, at the Christmas season.

The names of the World War I dead inscribed upon the monument under the words “These Laid Down Their Lives” are:

Leslie H. Anderson  
Verner Anderson  
Norman M. Angevine

James Bambax  
Fred M. Barsneck  
Leslie C. Bemis



WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL AND BOULEVARD

John W. Berberich  
 Frank Bonarek  
 Constantine J. Bournique  
 Felix E. Brenner  
 Nicholas Briscoe  
 Richard H. Brown  
 John B. Bulluss  
 Henry G. Burbank  
 James C. Call  
 Edward Casey  
 Homer F. Cashen  
 Joseph H. Collins  
 Jesse M. Curtis  
 Joseph G. Cyphers  
 Lorenzo D'Amico  
 William DeLuca  
 Antonio DeSandre  
 John J. Doran  
 Frank Dworak  
 Joseph H. Felix  
 Joseph Ferraro  
 John F. Fielding  
 Fred J. Gershefski  
 David Goldsmith  
 Joseph L. Gorman  
 Nathan Hale  
 Joseph E. Hall  
 Leroy C. Higginson  
 Nelson Hitchcock  
 Charles W. Jackson  
 H. Raymond Jopson  
 Adam Kaczynski  
 Anthony Kalinowski  
 Frederick H. Kantack  
 Otto C. Ketelhut  
 James C. Killeen  
 Jesse M. King  
 Edward J. Kline  
 Joseph Kowalski

Hugo W. Kruth  
 Henry E. LaCroix  
 Ernest A. LaRochelle  
 Everett E. Learmont  
 James V. Lizzi  
 Michael Louisi  
 Edward T. McCarthy  
 George C. McKenzie  
 Leonard F. Meiklem  
 Stanley Mesiak  
 Nicholas Mezzanotte  
 Joseph Mrozek  
 George W. Mueller  
 Daniel E. Murdock  
 Walter Nalewajek  
 Stanley Nurawski  
 William L. O'Donnell  
 Raphael Paone  
 Harold K. Patten  
 Walenty Ptak  
 H. Leslie Pulver  
 William J. Recican  
 Arthur A. Rehm  
 Earl L. St. Arnould  
 Thomas J. Siaflas  
 Horace G. Staniland  
 Harlan J. Stretch  
 George C. Summer  
 John Swider  
 Emil J. Trottier  
 William J. Ulbrand  
 Joseph C. Underwood  
 William H. Washington  
 Stanley B. Wheeler  
 Henry F. White  
 Peter Wieszcholek  
 Charles E. Wilkinson  
 Harry Wooley  
 Emil W. Zabel

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

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### The Depression

THE DEPRESSION that followed the stock market crash of 1929 spread rapidly throughout the country. Meriden began to feel its effects during the spring and summer of 1930. By January of 1931, the problem of the unemployed had become acute. Mayor Francis T. Maloney proposed a bond issue of \$250,000 for financing a program of public improvement, which was approved unanimously by the council. The approval of the legislature was necessary, and, by the time the General Assembly met, other programs had begun to take shape.

A campaign to determine the amount of public work that could be done here was undertaken after Mayor Maloney created the Research Commission in February 1932. The survey produced a figure of \$666,253. By September 1932, there were so many residents without jobs that a conference of city officials, bankers, and manufacturers was called to devise a plan to raise \$400,000 for relief. In October 1932, the council voted a bond issue of \$200,000 for sidewalks and other improvements.

On March 4, 1933 came the "bank holiday," when all financial institutions were closed. Four days later emergency measures were taken by the state legislature. Many banks in the country went to the wall, but all of Meriden's financial institutions were found to be in sound condition. They were allowed to reopen on March 13.

NRA was set up by the federal government, and pledges were issued in accordance with this plan on July 27, 1933. The next day the factories here adopted the code, and on July 31 a group meeting of merchants was held to agree on a code. By August, the famous "Blue Eagle" symbol was displayed everywhere. Two hundred women and 150 men had canvassed for converts to the program. For nearly two years, the program was generally accepted, but on May 27, 1935 the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. On December 13, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt pronounced NRA at an end, and the



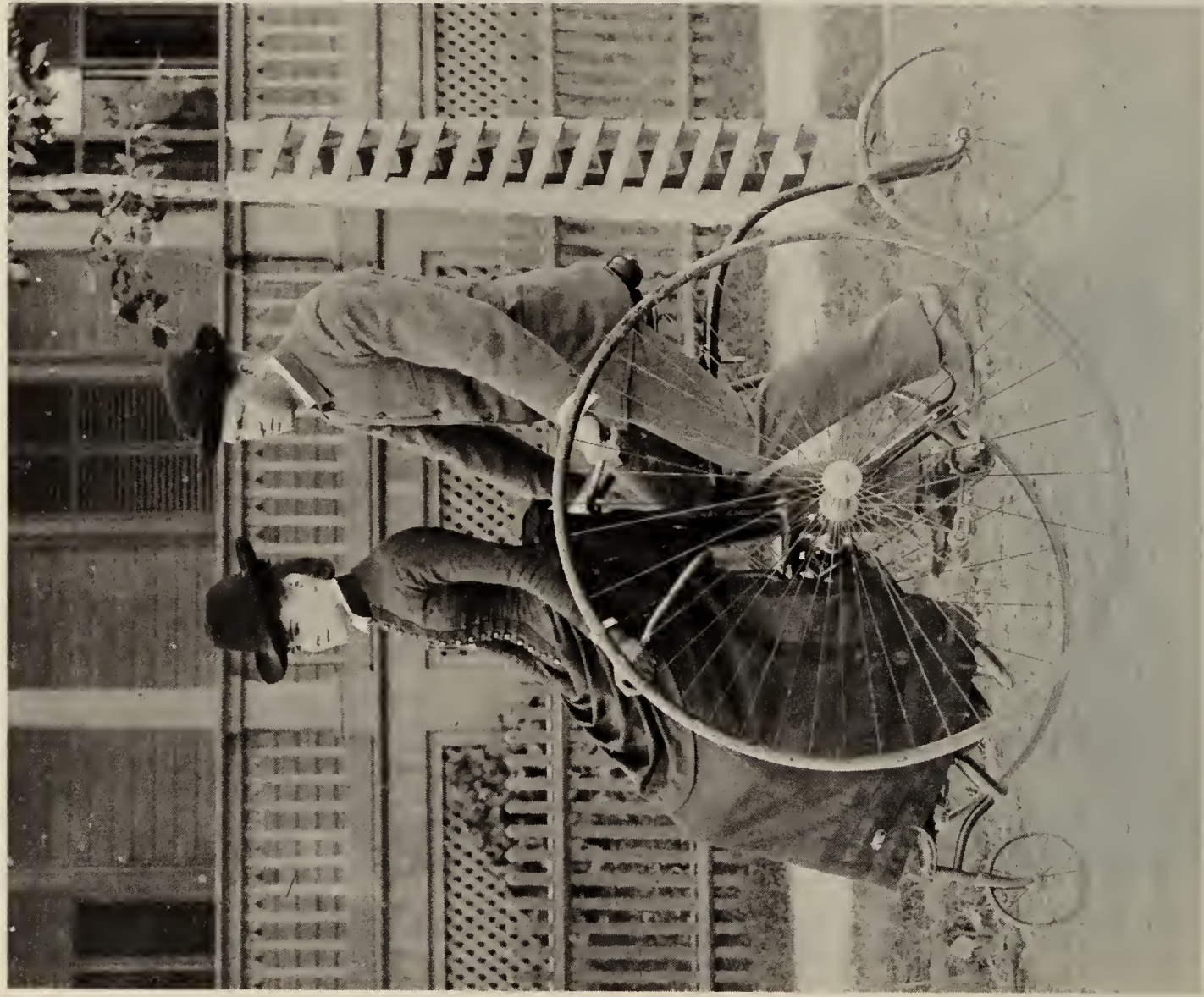


Meriden Roller Skating Rink  
Formerly near corner of Hanover Street and Randolph Avenue



Early ambulance, Meriden Hospital





Unique bicycle, "Built For Two"



"Old Leather Man"





First horsecar on Colony Street, 1887



Burning of the second Town Hall, 1904





The Meriden Trotting Park  
as it was, off Kensington Avenue



Fruit Pavilion, Meriden Fair Grounds





Broad Street Fire House  
Horse-drawn fire apparatus in the 90's

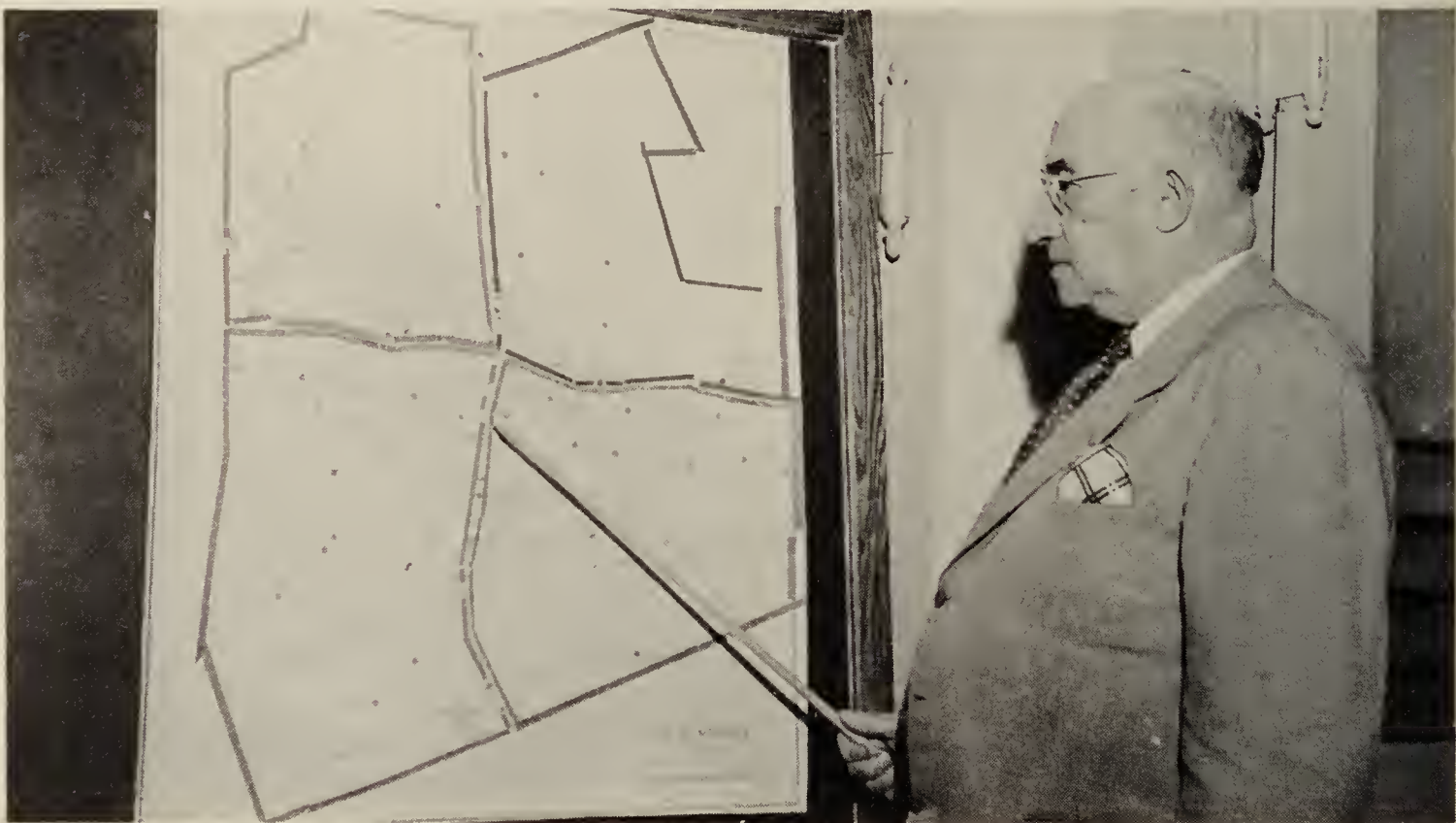


Fire Headquarters  
Pratt Street





Police Department, 1883  
 Left to right: Capt. George Van Nostrand, Chief Frank G. Bolles,  
 Roger M. Ford, who succeeded Bolles as Chief



Chief Michael B. Carroll Pointing to Civil Defense Map



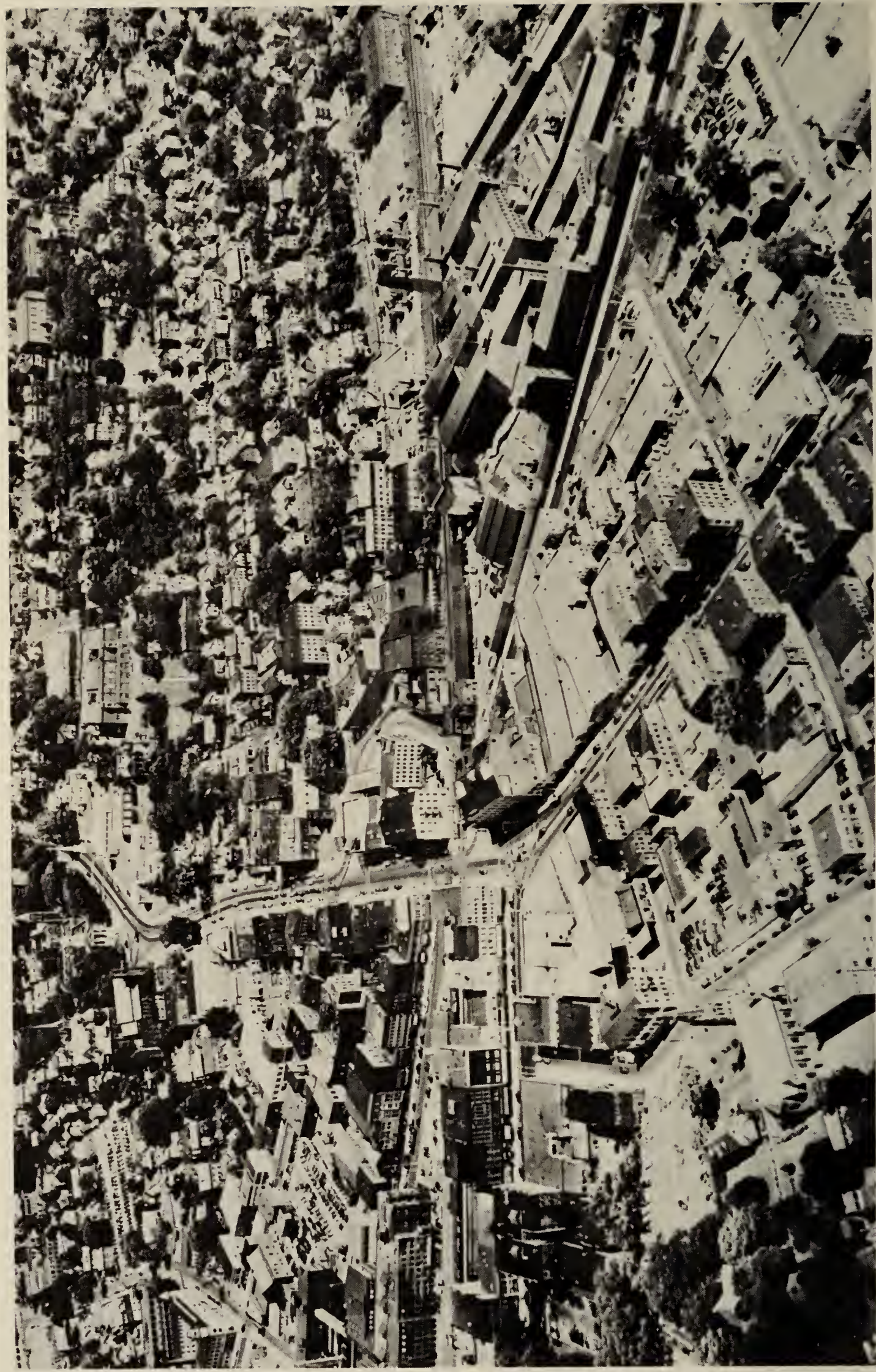


The Town Hall that burned in 1904



Stores decorated for the Centennial, 1906





An aerial view of the center of the city



Blue Eagles came down even more rapidly than they had been posted.

As early as 1933, the federal government had to come to the aid of distressed home owners. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation was opened here on August 28 of that year, and by January, 1935 there were 301 HOLC mortgages written for a total of \$1,201,454.

The work committee of the Research Commission, consisting of Charles N. Flagg, William S. Clark and Paul F. Fagan, was actively engaged in devising jobs for the unemployed. A municipal employment bureau under DeLloyd E. Beebe as manager was set up, and many hundreds of the jobless filed applications. The Community Fund set a goal of \$119,687 in 1931, with \$35,000 of it as a job fund. The goal was oversubscribed. A benefit card party was staged by city employees to help the jobless, and the Meriden Teachers Association voted to raise \$1250 for the cause.

Unemployed were set to clearing the reservoirs and salvaging firewood for the needy. By permission of the Connecticut Light & Power Company the wood was stored at its yard on South Colony Street.

These were bitter years for many, but the city administration, under Mayor Maloney, who had been Commissioner of Charities before his election as mayor, and who was to go on to a national career as U. S. Representative and later U. S. Senator, was doing everything possible for the relief of the distressed. Made-work projects appeared on every side. The Lewis Avenue dump was cleared and later turned into the city athletic field known as Columbus Park. Nine additional holes were constructed at the municipal golf course, giving employment to nearly 100 men at a cost of \$28,000. Total placements of the jobless in January, 1932 amounted to 1,248 out of the 1,870 who had registered by that time. In spite of extra grants of \$117,933, the city's auditors found a surplus of \$24,216 in February 1933, and the tax rate was fixed at 24½ mills, representing a half-mill cut.

The city, however, was tightening its purse strings in other ways, with cuts in the salaries of city employees, including the teachers. It was announced in March 1933, that Meriden had been able to reduce its bonded indebtedness during a period when many other Connecticut cities were in "hot water," and this in spite of the fact that more than \$500,000 had been spent on public

improvements since the depression began.

In March 1933, Post No. 45 of the American Legion promoted a drive against depression under Capt. W. S. Alexander, then its commander. The Legionnaires conducted a citywide survey of property owners, who declared themselves ready to spend many hundreds of thousands of dollars on improvements and in purchases.

In June 1934, there was a grant of \$105,400 for WPA to be applied toward building a road through Cat Hole Pass. The road was completed at a total cost of \$256,621, and was dedicated October 9, 1935 as the Chamberlain Highway. In October 1934, there was a bond issue of \$75,000 and in September 1935, ERA and WPA announced appropriations here of \$504,853.

The federal government granted \$133,534 in November 1935 for improvements to the airport in South Meriden. Additional allotments included \$157,571 for the laying of concrete sidewalks, \$18,911 to replace old water pipes, \$25,996 for new water pipes, and \$74,090 for concrete curbs.

The city was making large contributions also. An extra half mill was added to the tax rate for relief. The Community Fund was called upon to raise large sums after the drive in 1931, which provided \$35,000 for the purposes of the Research Commission. In 1932, the amount was \$90,000; the same in 1934, and \$40,000 in 1935, a total of \$225,000 from this source.

WPA hit a high mark in 1938 with 1,100 engaged here under this agency. Among the projects were reconstructing the drive to West Peak, the start of playgrounds in the north end, repairing and oiling of streets, the municipal parking lot on Church Street, Kenwood Camp for the Girl Scouts, Washington and Columbus Park extensions and improvements, the cleaning of brooks, repairing and repainting schools and other public buildings, construction of new sewer beds, the Washington Park Fieldhouse, and others.

The repairing of Hanover Dam, which had been swept away in the hurricane of 1938, caused considerable trouble after it had been proposed as a project. WPA approved, but army engineers objected to the plans. After work had been started in 1939, a "stop order" came through from Washington, and the city had to finish the job.

By May 1937, 127 families had been dropped from relief. By



September the WPA was providing 415 with work, a considerable reduction from previous figures. In October 1937, the Murdock Avenue water main project was approved for \$26,427. The load seemed to be eased somewhat until a new crisis of unemployment arrived in November. So great was the demand for work that the state armory had to be used to accommodate the crowd of applicants. By March 1938, 4,048 had applied. Relief expenses doubled. Many lost their homes through HOLC foreclosures. In the following year, the strain eased. By August, there was a sharp decrease in relief costs. By October, the situation had so improved that there was actually a shortage of WPA labor. In that year, \$200,000 in bonds provided money to rebuild streets, and \$80,000 was appropriated for a sewage disposal plant.

In January 1940, 14 new projects were announced, and WPA approved another \$48,861 for water mains. But by April of that year, WPA rolls were down to 80 persons, and by midsummer a labor shortage was reported.

Employment began to pick up here in November 1939. By March 1940, the New Departure Division of General Motors announced a 51.1 per cent increase in payrolls. By late 1941, the number of employees in 25 of the principal factories had increased from 6,508 in 1934 to 10,691, and payrolls had risen from \$104,630 to \$450,075 for the same group during that period. Much of this increase was due to the defense contracts received by local industries. The depression was over, but the country was about to enter World War II, with new problems even more serious than those which had been left behind.

Bad as it was, the depression was far less severe in its effects here than in many other Connecticut communities, for which diversification of industries may be considered partially responsible. Most factories were able to survive the period. There were no bank failures, and business collapses were few. Relief was ably administered, and the city's financial stability was never in doubt.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

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### City Government in This Century

HENRY D. ALTOBELLO, now serving his second term, is the 28th mayor of Meriden since the city was incorporated in 1867. He has the honor of presiding in the city's Sesquicentennial year just as Thomas L. Reilly, the 18th mayor, had the honor of being the chief administrator when the Centennial was observed in 1906.

The complete succession of Meriden mayors is as follows, the date given being the year of election: 1867, Charles S. Parker; 1869, Russell S. Gladwin; 1870, Isaac C. Lewis; 1872, Charles L. Upham; 1874, Horace C. Wilcox; 1876, H. Wales Lines; 1879, George R. Curtis; 1881, E. J. Doolittle; 1886, C. H. S. Davis; 1888, Wallace A. Miles; 1889, Benjamin Page; 1891, A. W. Tracy; 1892, G. H. Wilson; 1893, Amos Ives; 1899, E. E. West; 1901, George Seeley; 1905, Thomas L. Reilly; 1911, Daniel J. Donovan; 1915, Joseph A. Cooke; 1917, Henry T. King; 1919, Daniel J. Donovan; 1921, Henry T. King; 1925, Wales L. deBussy; 1929, Francis T. Maloney; 1933, Stephen L. Smith; 1937, Francis R. Danaher; 1947, Howard E. Houston; 1951, William J. Cahill, Jr; 1953, Henry D. Altobello.

Originally, mayors were elected for a term of one year. The term was extended to two years about the turn of the century.

Daniel J. Donovan, elected in 1911, served two terms, and was replaced by Dr. Joseph A. Cooke in 1915. He ran again in 1919, and was successful, serving one more term.

Henry T. King, elected mayor in 1917, served one term, and was defeated by Donovan in 1919. In 1921, he was again elected, and served two terms. He was defeated by deBussy in 1925.

These have been men of diverse personalities, of different political faiths, and various conceptions of the manner in which the office of mayor should be administered. Each man left his mark upon Meriden's history, and the present mayor will be no exception, for the city is entering upon a new phase of its development, with new programs to meet the demands arising from its enlargement.

When Charles Parker began his term, municipal government



was housed in the original town hall, sometimes called the "town house," which had been dedicated December 5, 1855, with a "Grand Congratulatory Festival." Its placement, on the site of the present city hall, had been much disputed. Residents of the east side, the oldest section of Meriden, wanted it built on or near Broad Street. Residents of rapidly growing West Meriden, where the railroad ran, sought just as earnestly to have the city hall placed in that section. The East Main Street site, about half-way up the hill, was a compromise. As it turned out, the location was sensibly chosen — far enough from the business center to avoid extreme traffic congestion, yet near enough to the heart of the city to be accessible to residents east, west, north, and south.

The first town hall served until 1889, when evidences were found of structural weakness, and it was pronounced unsafe for further use. An ornate building, similar in its general appearance to the high school annex at the corner of Liberty and Catlin Streets, was erected to replace it. In February 1904, this building was destroyed by fire.

A long discussion ensued as to the type of building best suited to the needs of expanding city government. The principal ground for contention was the proposal to erect an auditorium as part of the new city hall. Some considered this feature a needless expense, and an injunction was sought to prevent its construction. But the opposition was overcome and the plans were carried out, resulting in a structure which has been a source of pride for many years.

In appearance, there are few more appealing public buildings in New England, even today. Architecturally, the city hall fits perfectly into its setting. The lines are unostentatious, but the very simplicity of the design carries its own charm. The gold-crested dome, rising above the clock tower, sparkles in the sunlight, and the illuminated tower sends out radiance after dark. The tall, marble columns flanking the entrance are graceful and dignified. Their shafts are solid pieces of stone quarried in Vermont. Such columns are generally fluted and in lengthwise sections, or, if round, are in sectional blocks pieced together horizontally. Architects have been known to visit Meriden just to study this feature, which was considered unusual when the city hall was constructed and is even more rare today.

From any angle the building gives an impression of solidity and strength. It is unfortunate that the space provided within it

has become inadequate to the needs of the greatly enlarged city departments.

In the immediate vicinity of the city hall are buildings important to the cultural and religious life of the city, including the Curtis Memorial Library, the First Methodist Church, Temple B'Nai Abraham, St. Andrew's Church and the First Universalist Church. The broad sweep of East Main Street, joined by Liberty Street, Pleasant Street, and Catlin Street at this point, with Norwood Street connecting East Main and Liberty, place the seat of municipal government in an island position surrounded by streams of converging traffic. The tides of many civic interests are naturally drawn toward its shores.

The city hall cost \$212,000. Under the dual form of government still prevailing when it was erected, the city paid \$150,000 and the town contributed \$62,000, which defrayed the cost of the four marble pillars and other features of the facade. The building was formally accepted by both branches of government in 1907, although part of it had been placed in use the previous year. The auditorium was rushed to completion to house various portions of the Centennial program.

The population of Meriden at that time was 28,695, and the building was designed to serve a maximum population of 35,000. It was estimated that this figure would be reached in about 20 years. By now it has been far exceeded, since current estimates place the population at 48,900.

Many rearrangements of space have failed to solve the problem of overcrowding in the city hall. Early in 1956, the mayor announced a proposal which, he hopes, will relieve the congestion eventually. Under this plan, the police department, the city court and the probation department would be moved into the old welfare building, once the high school, where the education department is now quartered, and where certain high school classes are still held. The plan cannot be placed in effect until space is gained in the present high school building through the construction of a new high school on the west side.

Under Meriden's form of government the mayor has wide powers. As the chief executive officer he appoints the heads of departments, with the exception of the education department, which is under the elected Board of Education and its appointee, the superintendent of schools. He is, *ex officio*, a member of all



boards and usually presides at the meetings of the Board of Apportionment and Taxation.

The Court of Common Council is an elective body, made up of aldermen elected from each ward. It has the power to make, alter, and repeal ordinances, and may take property for public use by right of eminent domain, assessing benefits and damages. It is also empowered to authorize the treasurer of the city to obtain temporary loans and emergency loans. It passes upon bond issues, and its approval must be obtained before the annual budget of the city can be made effective, following review by the Board of Apportionment and Taxation. Regulation of the inspection of buildings, inspection of plumbing, inspection of milk and other foods, and the licensing of vendors and dealers, are among the other powers of the council. The council meets monthly to consider the various proposals brought before it, and often refers such proposals to committees within its membership for study before action is taken. In practice, matters are often decided in the caucus which is usually held before each meeting, and the vote later is only a formality.

This system has prevailed since the days of the town meetings, which were ended by consolidation of the town and city in 1922. In the town meetings, citizens had the privilege of the floor when recognized by the moderator, and could present their views. The public hearings held today on questions of importance do not take the place of the town meeting. The views presented by citizens at these hearings are merely for the guidance of the council which alone has the power of final action.

The old system of dual government died hard. The first proposal to replace it was made at a regular town meeting in 1892, when a vote was passed to form a committee to take steps toward consolidation. The committee named consisted of Levi E. Coe, Seth J. Hall, Wilbur F. Davis, E. A. Merriman, George M. Howell, George B. Murdock, Andrew J. Coe and George L. Hall. The next town meeting tabled their proposals.

A new committee was named by a town meeting October 12, 1896. This committee recommended on January 6, 1897 that a bill be introduced in the next General Assembly to authorize the consolidation of city and town, but this proposal was defeated.

In 1899, Mayor Ives appointed a committee to draft a consolidation charter. The committee was authorized to act for the

city and town in attempting to obtain the approval of this charter by the state legislature. On March 9, 1899, a turbulent town meeting voted to rescind the action of the previous meeting. The committee was instructed to oppose the bill instead of favoring it.

Again in 1902, a town meeting voted opposition to consolidation. A committee appointed by Mayor Reilly shortly before the Centennial made no headway with the proposal.

The subject lay dormant until 1913, when a consolidation bill was presented to the legislature, but a special town meeting on April 9 of that year instructed a committee to inform local members of the General Assembly of its opposition to the bill. In spite of this, the measure was passed and submitted to local voters in a referendum in connection with the regular town election October 6, 1913, when the proposal was defeated.

In the next session of the Assembly a new consolidation charter was presented. It drew the specifications for a commission form of government, a much more radical proposal than the form eventually adopted in 1921. Under this plan, the government would consist of a mayor, ten city "directors" or commissioners, and the various boards. The selectman's duties were defined as extending only to the admission of electors and entering or erasing names from the registry lists of voters. Provision was made for a city superintendent (whose duties corresponded with those of the present city engineer). Other officers included a tax collector and a health officer.

This charter was approved by the state legislature but defeated in a local referendum. However, some of its provisions have since been adopted, among them the payment of taxes in two installments, and the creation of a board of charities, now the welfare commission, as well as the appointment of a full time health officer.

The final, successful effort for consolidation began in 1919, instigated by the Chamber of Commerce. The motivating factor was the rescinding by a town meeting of an appropriation passed by a previous meeting to defray the expense of war gardens which had been promoted by the manufacturers. A large part of the sum voted had already been spent when the appropriation was snatched away. This action aroused much indignation, and a mass meeting was called, under the Chamber's auspices, to take steps toward doing away with dual government. Henry C. Bibeau, well-



known Colony Street grocer, was named chairman of a committee appointed to launch the effort. Judge Thomas P. Dunne, Charles F. Rockwell and C. R. Gardinor were appointed a sub-committee on copying features to be retained from the old charter. The general plan was for one tax district to include the whole territorial area of Meriden. A plan for a school board to consist of five members was set up, with candidates to be nominated by each party. The executive committee, with Mr. Bibeau at its head, consisted of Dr. E. T. Bradstreet, Robert G. Church, C. R. Gardinor, Joseph A. Greenbacker, Howard B. Hall, E. E. Smith, David Higgins, William J. Luby, Victor E. Lucchini, Harry W. Lyman, and William A. Schenck. The legislature approved the charter, which was submitted at a special election July 12, 1921, when a majority of the local voters gave its endorsement. The "thirty years war" for consolidation had ended. But it was not long before charter revision again became a live issue.

Under Mayor Stephen L. Smith in 1934 a charter revision committee was appointed with Robert M. Dowling, then a representative in the state legislature, as its chairman. It was non-partisan, with members chosen from both parties. Some of the group were sympathetic to a city-manager type of government. Eleven amendments were proposed for submission to the legislature, but the effort died, and a dozen years passed before a serious study of charter revision was attempted.

Early in 1948, another charter revision committee was appointed, and organized with Foster M. Johnson as its chairman. The group voted on February 20 to ask city officials and others to submit recommendations for charter changes not later than April 1. It also voted to bring all proposed changes before the Court of Common Council, urging that public hearings be held. The committee early announced that it favored consolidation of the two tax districts, with one tax rate for the entire city in preference to the system, still in vogue, of two tax districts with a lesser tax rate in the outer district. It also discussed the city-manager form of government. Proposals for a full-time fire marshal and a permanently appointed building inspector have since been adopted.

In May, the committee decried the apparent lack of local interest in charter revision. It sent out a questionnaire in an effort

to collect public opinion on controversial points. One change favored was to hold city elections in November at the same time as state and national elections, instead of in December. Public hearings were held as recommended. Group meetings heard well qualified speakers discuss the subject. Francis R. Danaher, former mayor, opposed holding a referendum on consolidation on the date of the national election, preferring a special election. Howard E. Houston was then mayor, but Mr. Danaher, at the beginning of his last term, had pronounced in favor of consolidation of the two tax districts.

On July 6, 1948, acting on a recommendation from the committee, the council voted to hold a special election, but set Tuesday, December 7, as the date. The proposals were voted down, but the question was not dead.

The charter revision committee continued its efforts. Mr. Johnson appeared before the cities and boroughs committee of the legislature on March 13, 1951 to explain a series of bills which had been introduced to bring about revision. Controversial provisions were submitted as separate bills. Special attention was given to Section 9 of the charter. In the opinion of bonding companies, this section was so worded that it interfered with bonding for improvements, other than schools, in the outer tax district. When the present charter was drawn in 1921, the first or outer district consisted largely of farm lands, and it was felt that a lower tax rate was justified for this type of property. A more equitable distribution of the cost of fire and police protection was considered desirable by the committee.

On June 14, 1951, Gov. John Lodge signed five bills to be voted on in a Meriden referendum on June 26. The first covered the question of the World War II Veterans Memorial Hospital. Next came the codification of the charter with changes which had been inserted by the Democratic senate. Another bill covered the change in election dates from December to November. The consolidation of the tax districts and the creation of a parking authority completed the list of measures to be submitted to the local electorate.

Under state law, 51 per cent of the qualified voters had to cast ballots in the referendum before the majority endorsement of any bill could be accepted as placing the measure in effect. This meant, as it turned out, that more than 6,200 votes of those cast



here had to be in favor of the revised charter and the parking authority. More than 24,600 persons here were eligible to vote. Former Mayor Henry T. King urged a "no" vote on all five questions. He said that charter revision could be attained through a few simple amendments, and saw "jokers" in the bills proposed. Consolidation of the tax districts, he thought, should be fought out as a separate issue.

The codification proposal was defeated in the June referendum, although the voters did approve a more equitable apportionment of fire and police expenditures between the two districts, thus opening the way to gradual consolidation. The results of the vote on the five proposals in a second referendum that fall included approval of the building of the Memorial Hospital with the city to supply part of the funds, approval of the change in election date, defeat of the revised charter, defeat of the extension of the second district, and a tie vote on the question of a parking authority. In the second referendum, only 7,000 votes were cast on these questions, although more than 18,000 voted on the candidates whose names were submitted in the regular election held on the same date. Charter revision had been defeated twice in one year.

In June 1954, Mayor Henry D. Altobello, then in his first term, declared the appointment of a new charter revision committee unnecessary, as the recommendations made by the committee headed by Mr. Johnson could be presented to the legislature with few changes, wherever it was considered advisable to do so.

Section 9 remained as a stumbling block to improvements in the outer district, and this obstacle was seen as even more serious because of the need to extend a sewer and water main to the new plant which the International Silver Company is constructing on South Broad Street. The impediment was removed when, on December 1, 1955, in a special flood relief session of the legislature, the cities and boroughs committee reported favorably on an amendment to Section 9. The bill, introduced by State Senator William J. Cahill, former mayor, was passed the following week and signed by Gov. Abraham Ribicoff. It permits the extension of sewer and water mains into the outer district without restrictions.

Although many of the changes in the charter sought by the various committees mentioned have been adopted, through

evolutionary processes, the charter in its published form remains as it was in 1931. In that year it was printed as a paperbound book by authority of the city. The second section contained all the by-laws in force December 1, 1931, and this section, much of which had become obsolete, did undergo complete revision. In 1950, a clothbound book was published by order of the council, containing the general ordinances of the city enacted as a whole March 6, 1950, and effective May 1 of that year. This book is entitled *The Code of the City of Meriden, Connecticut*.

The administrative officers of the city consist of the mayor, the city and town clerk, the comptroller, the treasurer, the tax collector, the chief of police, the chief of the fire department, the superintendent of fire and police signal services, the city engineer, the superintendent of public works, the superintendent of schools, the director of the Curtis Memorial Library, the superintendent of recreation, the superintendent of public welfare, the health officer, the food and milk inspector, the restaurant and housing inspector, the corporation counsel, the building inspector, the fire marshal, the judge of probate, the judge of the city and police courts, the deputy judge of the city and police courts, the city attorney, the assistant city attorney, the clerk of the city and police courts, the probation officer, the city sheriffs, the pound keeper and dog warden, the sealer of weights and measures, the tree warden, the superintendent of parks, and the chief clerk of the board of assessors.

The boards and commissions are the Board of Apportionment and Taxation, the Board of Public Safety, the City Planning Commission, the Board of Plumbing and Heating Examiners, the Welfare Commission, the Board of Electrical Examiners, the Board of Oil Burner Examiners, the Park and Recreation Commission, the Board of Trustees of the Memorial Hospital, the Board of Public Works, the Health Board, the Meriden Housing Authority, the Parking Authority, the Library Board, the Aviation Commission, the Board of Education, the School Building Committee, the Board of Building Commissioners, the Public Celebrations Commission, the Francis Maloney Scholarship Committee, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Jury Commission, the Citizens Committee on Sub-Standard Housing, the Investigation Committee on Comic Books, the Civil Defense Council and the Board of Assessors.



The Court of Common Council is made up of 20 members, four from each of the five wards. Its standing committees are finance, by-laws, street, printing, claims, license, water, lighting, fire-police, parks-recreation, Memorial Hospital, and sewer.

A few of the commissions were created to deal with special situations, and have become inactive since the particular need was covered. But the majority of the boards meet regularly and have much to do. Their composition is likely to change with each incoming administration, although mayors in recent years have tended to retain or to appoint a certain number of commissioners not of their own party. The Board of Apportionment and Taxation is non-partisan, with an equal number of Republicans and Democrats and some members not registered in any political party.

### THE CITY CLERK

One of the busiest and most important offices in the City Hall is that of the city clerk, Miss Ruth E. Payne, who has held that position, uncontested at elections, for many years. In her charge are all the vital statistics of the city's population, both births and deaths, as well as all records of real estate transactions, including purchases of property, sales and transfers. These records, with the exception of births and choses in action, are open to the public. Lawyers and newspaper reporters must consult them frequently. The land records stored in the city clerk's vaults date back to the year when the town government was established, 1806 and, in at least one case, even earlier. The first birth recorded was that of Homer Foster, born to Matthew and Charlotte Foster, April 12, 1806, and the first property transfer was from Moses Barnes to Eli Barnes, August 24, 1804. The office also issues the required licenses for marriages, dog licenses, and hunting and fishing licenses. Its duties multiply each year. In only one respect has the city's clerk's work decreased. She need no longer conduct title searches and make out legal papers connected with such searches. These tasks are now performed by lawyers and professional title searchers who require frequent access to the records on file.

### THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Department of Health, under Dr. John E. Stoddard, director,

has more than 20 employees, including physicians, health nurses, dentists, dental hygienists, sanitary inspectors, and a secretary.

The immunization program of the department ranges from kindergarten through high school, and a program for administering Salk vaccine against infantile paralysis was set up last year.

School cafeterias are inspected monthly. Food sanitation is an important feature of the department's work, and public eating establishments are visited regularly. Many recommendations for the protection of public health are made annually.

#### MERIDEN HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Meriden Housing Authority, created in 1943, consisting of five commissioners and an executive director, has charge of the public housing projects of Johnson Farms, Yale Acres, and Chamberlain Heights, all erected with state aid. The Gale Terrace project, built during World War II to relieve a pressing need, was continued after the war for a much longer period than had been contemplated when it was planned. Consisting of temporary housing units, it was intended for short-term occupancy. The units were finally vacated and cleared in 1955.

#### WELFARE COMMISSION

The Welfare Commission is under Charles L. O'Brien, superintendent, and deals with cases requiring relief. It has charge of Cold Spring Home. Heavily loaded during the depression, the pressures upon the department have diminished greatly since that time, and the city's contributions toward the support of distressed families and individuals have fallen year by year.

#### BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS

Fred H. Edwards is director of public works and C. Perry Prann is city engineer. The department has more than 100 employees. It has charge of the maintenance of the city's streets, bridges, basins and drains, snow clearance, trimming and removal of trees, garbage collection, dump maintenance, sewers, and sewage treatment.

#### WATER DEPARTMENT

The Water Department, also under the Board of Public Works, has charge of the city's water system, and the reading of water meters, as well as their installation.



ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

The Engineering Department makes all surveys, maps, and profiles for the establishment and record of all streets, buildings, walks, curb lines and grades. It prepares reports for the Board of Public Works, and the sewer and street committees of the Court of Common Council, and also assigns house numbers whenever applied for. The department is also responsible for keeping the assessors' maps up-to-date.

BOARD OF ASSESSORS

Robert H. Hallbach is chief clerk of the Board of Assessors, which records duplicates of all building permits and appraises the value of local property, both real and personal. It must inspect new buildings covered by permits, and furnishes the information from which the Grand List is made up.

The Board of Tax Review hears the complaints of aggrieved taxpayers and decides as to whether taxable lists shall be reduced.

The Zoning Board of Appeals holds public hearings on applications for variances submitted in accordance with the zoning laws and general statutes.

COMPTROLLER, TREASURER, AUDITORS

Matthew P. Kuta is city comptroller and Harold H. Flynn is city treasurer.

The office submits an accounting for General Fund operations each year. It records cash receipts and disbursements, and handles the city's payroll. It also examines the tax collector's transactions, and is responsible generally for the administration of the city's finances. Thomas J. Moroney is tax collector. Tax bills, issued in the spring, are payable in two installments.

The accounts of the city are audited annually by a firm of certified public accountants.

POLICE DEPARTMENT IN 1956

The Police Department is headed by Chief Michael B. Carroll, who became chief August 1, 1932. It consists of 88 superiors and patrolmen and 25 active supernumeraries. Fifty years ago, the force was composed of 18 men.

Chief Carroll is the 12th chief to serve since the appointment

of William Hagadon as the first chief in 1886. When he took command of the department, there were no police cruisers, no teletype machine, no radio system and only three telephones for police use.

Today the department has seven police cars, of which one is used by the chief and another by the Detective Bureau headed by Capt. Walter L. Kurcon, who is also deputy chief.

The department now has a teletype machine and its own radio system for communication with the cruisers equipped with two-way radios. An important phase of police work is fingerprinting. The National Bureau of Identification was started in 1928, and the Meriden department became a contributing member.

In 1928, when the direction of automobile traffic had become a serious problem, the department was equipped with automobiles and motorcycles to facilitate the work. Today it has a parking meter division, with a station wagon used in the collection of coins from parking meters. It also has three specially designed motorcycles to help in checking on parking violators.

The Police and Fire Signal Department is headed by Capt. Charles Zimmer, who has charge of the installation and maintenance of traffic lights, the signal system, and road signs.

A recent creation is the Records Division, headed by Lt. Lewis V. Aloia as superintendent of records.

The functions of the department have multiplied many times in recent years. In addition to traffic control and the investigation of major and minor crimes and nuisances, it handles school patrol, the policing of fires, investigation of traffic accidents, accidental deaths and suicides, escort duty, search for missing persons, obtaining physicians in emergencies, and furnishing testimony in court.

#### FIRE DEPARTMENT IN 1956

The Meriden Fire Department in this Sesquicentennial year is composed of 72 full-time officers and men, headed by Fire Chief Leonard A. Petrucelli, who was born in 1906, when the city celebrated its Centennial.

The department consists of five companies: Engine Company Three, Broad Street; Engine Company Four, Colony Street; Engine Company One, Butler Street, and Engine Company Two and Truck Company One, fire headquarters, Pratt Street.



The motorization of the department began in 1910, and by 1913 it had been completed. The five horses were replaced by mechanized apparatus. The age of horse-drawn fire engines had passed, never to return.

In 1913, the department had a ladder truck, a Webb pumper manufactured in 1910, a Pope-Hartford fire engine and two American LaFrance trucks.

Today it has eight vehicles for fighting fires, the oldest a 1930 American LaFrance pumper. The latest purchases were two 1955 pumpers of the same make.

The present 75-foot aerial ladder truck is of 1932 vintage. However, the city has an appropriation of \$32,000 for the purchase of a new aerial truck. The chief's car, a 1947 sedan, will be replaced during the current year.

The Fire Department now has 72 regular firemen and a number of substitutes. Of the regulars, five are engaged in duties other than the actual fighting of fires. One is Fire Marshal Joseph R. Rogoz. Another is Deputy Fire Marshal Capt. Harry Drucquer, and the other three are connected with the Police Fire and Signal Department. They are Capt. Leonard Gudain and Firemen Rodney Zimmer and Theodore Burdacki.

The rest of the men compose "the fire force," to use Chief Petrucelli's term.

Twelve men are permanently assigned to each fire station (exclusive of headquarters), plus four substitutes. At fire headquarters there are 15 regulars plus four substitutes. At headquarters, also, are stationed the chief and three assistant chiefs.

A two-platoon system was introduced in 1924. After 12 working days, a fireman had a full day off. This plan replaced a system under which a fireman was stationed at a firehouse day and night, and was allowed to go home twice a day for meals and to attend church services on Sunday.

In October 1951, the three-platoon system was installed. Firemen now work 56 hours per week, alternating on a schedule of three days and three nights, with off-duty time in the interim.

Fire Chief Petrucelli is on call around the clock, and answers all box alarms. His driver is always posted on the whereabouts of the chief.

The Meriden Fire Department is today efficient and well-organized. Its effective work has received many compliments

locally and from municipal officials in other communities. Like the Police Department, it is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Public Safety, which makes the appointments and promotions in the department besides fixing policies and deciding on questions of discipline.

### THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT

The Building Department, under the building inspector, is heavily loaded with work as a result of the tremendous increase in building here. Permits are required for all types of construction, which must be in conformance with city regulations. Properties are inspected while under construction. Under a revised building code, recently approved by the council, boards of examiners have been created for all trades to insure competence of workmen. The examiners have been appointed by the mayor, and copies of the new code are now available to tradesmen.

### MALONEY MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Senator Francis Maloney served the city of Meriden and the nation faithfully and brilliantly, first as mayor of Meriden, then as Congressman from this district, and later as United States Senator. The beginning of the new year of 1945 found Meriden people infinitely saddened by the Senator's sudden and untimely death. Immediately a citywide desire to establish a special and significant memorial to this distinguished native son took shape.

Mayor Francis Danaher appointed a Maloney Memorial committee under chairmanship of Dr. James F. Walsh to explore the various proposals offered. Upon the recommendation of this committee a petition was submitted to the Court of Common Council at its April 2, 1945 meeting, and unanimously adopted. It provided for the establishment of the Francis Maloney Memorial Scholarship in the amount of \$500 annually for four years to be granted each year to a properly selected Meriden resident qualified to continue the type of higher education of his or her personal selection.

The question of legality of this unique memorial whereby the city would be pledging \$2000 for all future years, once the full quota of deserving students should be recipients of the scholarship, had to be settled. On May 17, 1945 the Connecticut Assembly suspended its rules and passed bills presented by Senator Harold



C. Hall and Representative William Jacobs authorizing the city of Meriden to establish the scholarship in perpetuity.

Accordingly, in October of the same year, Mayor Danaher appointed the first Maloney Scholarship committee of five with Dr. Walsh its chairman. In 1946 the first Meriden High graduate was selected for the honor. Each succeeding year has seen a local boy or girl accepting the grant and the responsibility attendant upon its acceptance.

The scholarship plan was originated because of Senator Maloney's personal feelings on the subject of sufficient formal education as preparation for life. He was forced to become self-supporting and to assume partial support for others in his family before he could finish high school. He never ceased to feel that his shortened years of schooling constituted a lack in himself. Life and experience and his extraordinarily keen mind had more than compensated, but it remained his regret.

Consequently the scholarship was offered to perpetuate his memory and in the belief that it would, and will continue to encourage young men and women of outstanding ability to emulate Senator Maloney's character and to follow in his footsteps of great and wise public service. The memorial is unique in its character and unprecedented in the record of municipal action. It has been widely acclaimed by leaders in the field of national public service impressed by Meriden's independence of action and selectivity in designing a tribute to the man who was known in Washington as the "Senator's Senator."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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### Local Industry Since 1900

THE INDUSTRIAL picture of Meriden at the beginning of the new century included many details which have since been erased by the changing course of events. But the substantial elements remain unimpaired. The firms which have vanished into the misty past have been replaced by others, painted in strong new colors. The total number represented has been greatly increased, and the total output has been multiplied many times.

Industries in 1900 were in a transition stage, from old to new methods of production. Water power, by which the wheels of the earliest factories were turned, had been replaced by steam power, and many plants had already converted from steam power to electric power. Industrial leaders were looking ahead and studying ways and means of meeting competition with better quality products made as economically as possible. The basic materials used here were wood, ivory, bone, horn, iron, steel, copper, lead, zinc, nickel, tin, silver, gold and glass. Alloys were still in their infancy, but were applied as experimentation proved their worth.

The automobile industry was newly born, but showing evidences of healthy growth. The internal combustion engine had great potentials, it was recognized. It might, in time, supply the new power factor needed.

The success of Meriden's Centennial observance gave the city new confidence. The new model automobiles seen in the parades of 1906 had more significance than the novelty of the spectacle. They were the heralds of an entirely new enterprise with enormous possibilities of growth in which Meriden later would share.

The list of factories in Meriden at the time of the Centennial, with the years of their establishment, follows:

A. H. Jones, 1901; Jennings & Griffin, 1880; the Kelsey Company, 1872; Edward Miller Co., 1844; Meriden Cutlery Company, 1855; C. F. Monroe Co., 1886; Meriden Curtain Fixture Co., 1869; Miller Bros. Cutlery Co., 1870; Meriden Fire Arms Co., 1905; Manning Bowman & Co., 1872; Morehouse Bros., 1898; Meriden



Braid Co., 1906; Meriden Machine & Tool Co., 1889; J. J. Niland Co., 1902; Elias Oefinger, 1900; Charles Parker Co., 1832; M. B. Schenck Co., 1887; Silver City Glass Co., 1905; Charles E. Schunack Co., 1891; Wilcox & White Co., 1887; Frank Wheeler & Son, 1889; F. J. Wallace, 1876; Wm. Wheeler Co., 1891; Webster & Briggmann, 1891; Helmschmied Mfg. Co., 1903; A. J. Hall Co., 1899; Foster, Merriam & Co., 1850; Fritz Bros., 1903.

Before the entry of America into World War I, a new class of production had become established. Soon after the war began in Europe, it became apparent that the United States would be called upon to supply large amounts of war materials to the combatant nations.

As it became apparent that this country would be drawn into the conflict, preparations of a defensive nature became urgent, and the government began to issue large contracts for armaments to equip its own forces. Other classes of products were needed also, as the armed services grew. Before the war ended in 1918, most Meriden industrial firms were fully engaged in war production, and many companies which could not be strictly classified as industrial, were contributing largely to the war effort through the service of supply. Among them were many mentioned previously in this chapter, and some established after 1906. A survey, made especially for this volume, records the names of A. H. Jones; the Jennings & Griffin Mfg. Company; the Kelsey Co.; Julius Katt; Kennedy & Ragone Co.; Wm. J. Luby; Landers, Frary & Clark (purchased the Meriden Cutlery Co. in 1919); S. C. Lewis (wood planing and turning); Edward Miller Co.; Meriden Cutlery Co.; C. F. Monroe Co.; Miller Bros. Cutlery Co. (succeeded by the Meriden Knife Co.); Manning, Bowman & Co.; Meriden Gravure Co.; Morehouse Bros.; Max Merklinger; Meriden Press & Drop Co. (established 1911, successor to A. H. Merriman); Merriam Metal Patterns and Model Works; Meriden Braid Co. (succeeded by Pioneer Braid Co.); Meriden Optical & Jewelry Co.; Meriden Jewelry Mfg. Co. (established 1914); Meriden Machine & Tool Co.; J. J. Niland Co.; New England Pottery Co.; New England Westinghouse Co. (in war production 1916 to 1918, followed by the Colt Patent Firearms Co. in the same building, now the International Silver Company's north end plant); Elias Oefinger; the Charles Parker Company; The Penfield Mfg. Company (established 1911 to

make automobile spotlights); the Peerless Mfg. Company (established 1917 to manufacture brass articles); the H. E. Rainaud Company (1913 to 1929); Rockwell Silver Co.; Remo Co.; M. B. Schenck Co. (a division of the Bassick Company in 1917; removed in 1928); Silver City Glass Co.; Charles E. Schunack Co.; Saviteer Memorial Works; J. H. Sanderson (electroplating); Tredennick Paint Mfg. Company; W. H. Thompson Candy Co.; Tillinghast Silver Co.; Henry B. Todd (X-ray machines and appliances); Universal Music Co. (music rolls and records); Vacuum Specialty Co.; Vocalion Organ Co.; Wilcox & White Co. (closed 1921; recording laboratory and studios open until 1925); Frank Wheeler & Sons; F. J. Wallace (saddlery hardware); Wolf's New Process Abrasive Wheel, Inc. (1919); Wm. Wheeler Co. (photoengraving); White, Bottrell & Page Co. (printing); Webster & Briggmann (glass cutters); Waterbury Clock Co. (branch); Andrew Young & Sons (machine tools); Doolittle Box Co. (1918; purchased by J. R. Hall 1930).

The Meriden Electric Light Company and the Meriden Gas Light Company, then operated as separate companies, were naturally all-important to the war effort as sources of light and fuel.

Some concerns arrived shortly after the war period, just too late to play a part in war production here. The principal company to be noted in this class is New Departure, which began producing in Meriden in 1920. Lemke & Reiske, metal work, was established in 1924. The Meriden Rug Company, now the Perry Rug Company, began business in 1929. Handley Bros. Co., founded in 1922, was part of the local business picture until 1949.

Production of goods for civilian consumption was resumed soon after the war, and proceeded in growing volume until the depression — dealt with in another chapter — began to curtail demand. There were some industrial casualties in the years which followed, among them the Handel Company, lamp manufacturers, established in 1883. The factory ceased operations about 1935, and the corporation was officially terminated in 1941. But in the meantime, other companies had arrived to occupy most of the building.

Most of the companies previously mentioned, which had played a part in World War I production and supply, had another opportunity to serve as contributors to the new effort



which began as World War II loomed. By that time, there were additional concerns to augment local industry, including wholesale supply and other forms of business outside the retail picture. Among them were Goodman Bros., who moved into the former Morehouse Bros. plant; Miller-Johnson, Inc. (established 1936); the Meriden Buffing Company; Mero Mfg. Co. (established 1926); Metallic Potters Co.; Mederick Marchand; Meriden Wire-frame Co.; Monowatt Electric Corp.; Nutmeg Press; Ellmore Silver Co. (established 1924); the General Electric Company (branch factory established here in 1931, removed in 1948); Packer Machine Co., automatic buffing and polishing machinery, (established 1925); the W. J. Packer Mfg. Company; Charles W. Parker, printer; Phillips Mfg. Company (established 1929); Rich Display and Plastics (established 1929); Rockwell Silver Co.; H. E. Rainaud Co.; Rubber Specialty Co.; Herco Art Mfg. Co. (1927-1944; successor to H. E. Rainaud Co., now in Wallingford); John R. Sexton Co., tinsel cord (established 1927); Henry E. Shiner Co.; Storts Welding Co.; Standard Cutlery Co.; J. Schaeffer Co., lamp shades; Tillinghast Silver Co.; Hyman Tanger Co.; Lutz Co., silver products (1947-1952); Lambson Specialty Co. (established 1942); Meriden Bedding Co.; Oregon Silver Co. (established 1941); Puffe Tool and Die Co.; N. W. Parks Co. (purchased C. E. Schunack Co. in 1944); Production Equipment Co. (established 1939); Price Pattern Shop; James E. Bunting, Jr.; Brooklyn Thermometer Co.; R. Bemont & Son; Chandler-Evans Corp. (established 1940, removed 1945); Sonora Record Co. (sold to Connecticut Record Mfg. Company, removed 1948); Connecticut Gas Products; Daylight Mfg. Company; Franklin Dress Co. (established 1941); G. H. French & Co.; T. D. Hotchkiss Co.; W. H. Leaman Co.; Meriden Electroplating & Finishing Co.; Albert Mitchell; Meriden Welding Co.; R. & H. Machine Shop (1943-1956); Shaw Paper Box Co.; Vincenzo Torchia; Frank M. Whiting Co. (1939); E. C. Wilcox Corp.; F. L. Waller Co.; Youngberg Bros.

Among the companies which have entered the local field since the end of World War II are the Meriden Foundry Company, in 1946; Meriden Precision Screw Products in 1947; the Muirson Label Company, which took over the former Chandler-Evans plant in South Meriden in 1949 after it had been vacated by the

Nestle Lemur Company, which had occupied it from 1945; Rose Window Products in 1950.

### LARGER INDUSTRIES

#### THE INTERNATIONAL SILVER COMPANY

The alliance of silver manufacturing concerns which had taken place in the last decade of the 19th century was in a strong position in 1900 to proceed to even greater gains. As the International Silver Company, the consolidation had attained the advantage of unified corporate management, and the best experience of each concern could be exploited for the benefit of all, while weaker spots could be strengthened or else incised.

George H. Wilcox, first vice president when the new concern was organized, succeeded to the presidency in 1907, and served in that office until 1928, when he became chairman of the board. Under him, the company made steady, consistent progress in expanding sales and improving manufacturing processes. He died in 1940.

Clifford R. Gardinor, who had been Mr. Wilcox's assistant for seven years, was elected president in 1928. He had joined the company in 1909 as purchasing agent. His death occurred in 1935.

Vice President Evarts C. Stevens, who had come up from the bench in the silverware industry, was elected to succeed Mr. Gardinor. His elder brother, Frederick M. Stevens, and his younger brother, Maltby Stevens, were among his executive associates. The Stevens family had a long tradition of silver-making, dating back to the earliest days of the industry.

The new president set up an organization in which Executive Vice President Roy C. Wilcox, elder son of George H. Wilcox, was made responsible for the purchasing and traffic departments in addition to other specific duties.

From 1915 until his death in 1928, George D. Munson had been active in the company, serving as a member of the executive committee and first vice president, and taking part in general management. His son, Vice President Craig D. Munson, was made general sales manager, responsible to the president. Alpeck Zeitung, director of flatware sales, now retired, had charge of the general advertising department as one of his responsibilities. Horace C. Wilcox, younger son of "G. H.," was made director



of holloware sales. Herbert J. Reeves, who has since retired, was in charge of the controller's office. He was succeeded in this position by George L. Stringer.

Important changes in top management have taken place during the last five years. On January 31, 1951, Maltby Stevens was elected president of the company to succeed his brother, Evarts C. Stevens, who was named chairman of the board of directors. Maltby Stevens had been in charge of all the manufacturing operations of the company for a number of years, and had made an outstanding record in handling war production. Lee F. Revere succeeded him in charge of manufacturing operations, and was elected a vice president in March 1951.

Maltby Stevens died June 29, 1955, having served only a little more than four years as president of the company with which he had been connected from early youth.

On July 27 last year, Craig D. Munson of Wallingford was elected president. Previously, he had been vice president for sales. He joined the company in 1920, was made advertising manager of the sterling division in 1924, and became manager of that division and a company director in 1928. In 1929 he was made a member of the executive committee, and was elected vice president for sales in 1935.

To succeed Mr. Munson in charge of sales, John B. Stevens, son of Evarts Stevens, was elected vice president, director and executive committee member. He became affiliated with the company in 1939 as manager of the statistical department, held several managerial positions, and became general sales manager of wholesale lines in 1954, the position which he held at the time of his elevation to the new office.

Many changes in manufacturing methods have taken place in the silver industry during this century. The Rogers Bros. of 1847 did their silverplating in a little tank holding only five or six gallons of solution. The silver did not cling to the base material as it does today. Occasionally, peeling took place. Now the plating is done in 3,000-gallon tanks, and the process is completed within a much shorter time, due to the stepping-up of the electrical output, which has been multiplied 600 times over the amount of current originally fed. The cleaning operation is sufficiently thorough to hold the silverplate permanently, but mild enough not to destroy the finely buffed finish of the base metal. A system

of solution, agitation and racking, plus laboratory control of the solution's composition, enables the operator to make the silver-plate heavier on the parts most subject to wear.

In 1923, the company purchased the Meriden Malleable Iron plant to become the center of its cutlery departments, moved there from Factory H. A modern electric casting and rolling mill was erected at the north end. The Wilcox & Evertsen sterling factory was transferred to the remodeled building on North Colony Street.

In 1928, International took over E. G. Webster & Son and moved its operations from Brooklyn to Meriden. A year later, LaPierre Mfg. Company of Newark, N. J. was moved to Wallingford. By 1932, the buildings on Colony Street, at the intersection of Cross Street, which had originally been used by the Meriden Silver Plate Company and the Barbour Silver Plate Company, were remodeled into the Sales Service Institute. The plant in Derby was closed in 1935, and in the same year the company took over the American Silver Company in Bristol. The plant in Waterbury, which had been producing flatware as Rogers & Brother since 1858, was closed, but the line was continued.

The story of International's production during World War II is a story in itself. The conversion from peacetime to wartime efforts began in 1940, when silverware production in Meriden and Wallingford was almost at a peak. By June of 1943, the company was engaged practically 100 per cent in war production. The products were numerous and varied, ranging from incendiary bombs to surgical instruments. During this period, the company and its workers won many awards for their contribution to the war effort.

Readjustment of the whole pattern of production became necessary once more after the war ended, and was accomplished with a minimum of dislocations. By October 1945, the company was delivering substantial quantities of its normal lines.

In 1947, construction of a new plant to house flatware production was started north of Wallingford, just off route 5. It was opened in 1949, and is considered the most modern plant of its type in the world.

To meet the demands of defense production, the company has built a \$1,500,000 addition to its new Factory A in Wallingford. It was constructed especially to handle contracts for component



parts for jet engines. Machinery and equipment were furnished by the government, but the plant is owned by the company.

In February 1950 it was announced that International had obtained an option on 35 acres of land on South Broad Street, known as the Watrous farm, just within the city limits of Meriden. A zoning variation was sought to permit the erection of a new plant and an administration building on this site, and the Court of Common Council on March 7, 1950 unanimously voted for the change required. Ground was broken on September 6, 1955, but a further step was necessary before construction could proceed. A new interpretation of Section 9 of the City Charter had to be obtained from the state legislature to permit the extension of sewer and water facilities to the site. Through the efforts of Mayor Altobello and Meriden legislators this was achieved last year without the necessity of a referendum. In the construction permit the cost of the plant was placed at \$4,000,000. Eventually all the offices and production will be moved from State Street to the new location.

#### NEW DEPARTURE DIVISION OF GENERAL MOTORS

The New Departure Division of General Motors, which began operations here in 1922, manufactures anti-friction ball bearings for a wide variety of uses. It employs approximately 4,000 persons and has contributed much to the city's growth and prosperity.

Meriden is one of the three cities in which this division of General Motors operates. The parent plant is in Bristol, where the business was founded in 1888. Another plant in Sandusky, Ohio, was opened in 1946.

The company acquired the "old woolen mill" on Pratt Street in 1920. Practically the whole interior of the building was removed during the renovations which followed. Office personnel were located on the first floor, with the mechanical departments on the second and third floors. Another building for manufacturing purposes was erected to the west, adjoining the office-mechanical areas.

When operations began, approximately 300 men and women were on the payroll. Most of the supervisory personnel was transferred from Elmwood and Bristol, including the plant's first manager, the late Charles M. Gearing, who later became division works manager. Later top executives were Milton L. Gearing,

son of the original plant manager, John J. Curry, William E. Murden, and Robert T. Collins. The present plant manager is Harry Burgess.

At the outset many of the local plant's employees were transported to and from Bristol, and participated in training operations here.

Since the Meriden plant was opened, ball bearings of the smaller sizes have been added to production for such applications as generators, household appliances, electric motors, and instruments.

The production performance of New Departure here during World War II was regarded as a marvel by all who had contact with it. Millions of bearings were turned out to help equip the armed forces. The plant operated on a three-shift basis around the clock seven days a week. In January 1944, the Meriden division recorded its all-time high in employment with 8,082 men and women on the payroll. It received a number of awards from the government for its achievements.

During the war, the production of instrument ball bearings became especially important. The Meriden plant was selected to begin the manufacture of these ultra-precise products. A plant in Guilford, employing about 300 hands, was maintained at that period, but it was closed after the war and most of its employees came to Meriden.

In 1942, New Departure enlarged its manufacturing facilities here by acquiring a plant, on the opposite side of Pratt Street, from the International Silver Company. A section of the buildings was razed later to provide additional parking space.

In December 1954, a modern industrial waste treatment system was installed. It eliminates oils and chemicals from water used in processing operations before it flows into Harbor Brook.

The local division has helped to promote and has contributed largely to many community programs. Hundreds of plant employees over the years have engaged in many activities for civic benefit.

Many improvements in manufacturing operations have been made in recent years, resulting in products of better quality and increased quantity.

Harry T. Burgess, manager of the Meriden plant, has been with



the bearing firm since 1928, rising through the positions of foreman, superintendent, personnel manager, and general superintendent before being appointed to his present position. With him are associated C. Frederick Crow, factory manager; John DiFrancesco, production manager; Oscar Liebreich, chief inspector; Joseph Robinson, personnel manager; George Smith, master mechanic, and Edward Noon, resident comptroller.

### THE MILLER COMPANY

The Miller Company, one of Meriden's oldest industrial plants, is currently in its 112th year as a manufacturer of lighting fixtures. The industry began in 1844 in a small shop that produced candlesticks and oil-burning lamps. Today it has factories and offices in Meriden and in Ohio.

When kerosene was distilled from bituminous coal in 1858, Miller was the first concern in the country to design, produce, and market a kerosene-burning lamp. During the Victorian era, the company pioneered in the design and production of gas fixtures. Later came the lamps using the Wellsbach mantle, Edison's carbon filament incandescent lamp, mercury-vapor and, in 1938, fluorescent lighting.

In addition to the illuminating division, the Miller Company has in Meriden a brass rolling mill which was started in 1868. It was originally intended to supply only the brass parts used here in making lamps, but has since grown to become a national supplier of phosphor bronze and brass.

The officers of the company are Burton G. Tremaine, chairman of the board; Burton G. Tremaine, Jr., president; William H. Fitzpatrick, secretary-treasurer; Frederick R. Slagle, vice president and manager of the rolling mill division; Henry J. Millington, vice president and manager of the illuminating division, and L. Melvin Grawemeyer, vice president in charge of sales for the illuminating division.

The company's factories and offices in Meriden employ 282 persons in the illuminating and rolling mill divisions.

The rolling mill division is currently undergoing a five-year million-dollar expansion and modernization program which began in 1954.

A custom shop was established in connection with the illuminating division two years ago. In it custom fixtures are hand made

for special orders received from churches, schools, offices, and government buildings and installations.

Electronic equipment to accelerate payroll and billing procedures was recently installed. Communication between the Meriden and Ohio plants is almost instantaneous by means of an electronic device. Orders received in Meriden can be transmitted to Ohio in a matter of seconds.

The fluorescent manufacturing facilities were transferred to Ohio from Meriden in 1947, but there is an increasing demand for the incandescent lighting equipment manufactured here, offering great promise for future productivity.

### THE CHARLES PARKER COMPANY

The Charles Parker Company is the oldest industry in Meriden, dating back to 1832. Its progress in the nineteenth century has been recorded previously in this volume.

The most important change since 1900 occurred when the Parker Company in 1940 purchased the Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Company, another old concern, founded in 1854. Through the purchase additional manufacturing capacity was obtained. A line of lighting fixtures and architectural metal work was added to production, which was concentrated in the plants on Hanover Street.

In addition to a complete rearrangement of facilities, a rebuilding and modernization program was undertaken and machinery was installed to meet modern competition. The concern has approximately 300 employees.

Products include foundry-selected non-ferrous castings requiring special alloys and treatment, as well as machine-finished castings; structural iron fire escapes, staircases, grille work and railings, both bridge and highway; sheet metal, precision instruments and aircraft specification work; bathroom cabinets, distributed through plumbing jobbers on a nationwide basis; bathroom fixtures of chrome and anodized aluminum, in color, for wood and tile applications; mirrors made with stainless steel or brass with chrome plating; vises for machinists and the home workshop; special lighting for churches, public buildings and banks.

The officers of the company are Parker B. Allen, president; C. T. Jordan, J. J. Connors and McRae Curtis, vice presidents;



O. C. Hugo, secretary; W. E. Ackroyd, treasurer. McRae Curtis is factory manager.

#### THE CUNO ENGINEERING CORPORATION

The Cuno Engineering Corporation was established in 1912 by Charles H. Cuno and his father, the late Charles F. Cuno. The original products of the company were electrical automotive specialties.

The company acquired the Board of Trade building on South Vine Street in 1925, and made additions to it as its growth continued. With the development of the Cuno "Auto Klean" filter for aircraft engines and airplanes, the company began an outstanding contribution to the aircraft industry. The filters were rapidly adopted for the hydraulic systems of planes for retractable landing gear, brakes, wing flaps, turrets, etc. During World War II, the production of this type of equipment increased enormously, and the company's contribution to the war effort was most important.

Since the war, the company has concentrated on the manufacture of industrial filters and automotive electrical equipment. It has 400 employees.

In 1951 an addition to the plant was constructed at a cost of \$470,000 to provide 42,600 square feet. Completely modern in design, the new building is considered a model example of manufacturing facilities. In 1955, the Cuno output was valued at \$5,400,000.

Alfred Kroll is manufacturing manager.

The officers of the corporation are Murray McConnel, president; Roy Scott, executive vice president; Carlton H. Winslow, vice president and secretary; Philip Ricciardi, treasurer; Alvin C. Bruel, Jr., assistant secretary; Lois Z. Fagan, assistant secretary; D. Warren Brooks, assistant treasurer.

#### THE NAPIER COMPANY

The origin of the Napier Company may be traced back to the firm of Whitney & Rice, founded in 1875 in North Attleboro, Mass., which made massive gilt watch chains for men. The company was purchased by E. A. Bliss and his business associate Mr. Carpenter, who retired not long afterward. The E. A. Bliss Company, with Mr. Bliss as its active head, was incorporated on

July 27, 1882 in Massachusetts. The company made a varied line of jewelry and giftwares. In 1890, it moved to Meriden to occupy a plant at the north end which had previously been one of the first ornamental glassware producing factories in the country. The firm then became incorporated in Connecticut.

In 1893 the manufacture of sterling silver giftwares was begun. The company claims to be the first concern in Meriden to manufacture sterling silver merchandise.

Mr. Bliss made his first trip to Europe in 1897 to study European fashions and to purchase materials. Since that time, executives and members of the designing staff have crossed the ocean frequently for the same reasons. Mr. Bliss died in 1911, and his son, William E. Bliss, became the active head of the company.

In December 1914, James H. Napier became associated with the company as general manager and director. Under his leadership a program was instituted which resulted in new manufacturing methods with the addition of new machinery, and a line of products which rapidly gained entry into the world of fashion jewelry and giftwares.

During World War I, the company was one of the first in Meriden to convert to the manufacture of war materials, making bayonet scabbards, gas masks, gas mask parts, trench mirrors and vane braces.

Mr. Napier was elected president and general manager in 1920, and the company's name was changed to the Napier-Bliss Company. In 1922, the present name, the Napier Company, was adopted.

In March 1928, the company purchased the land and buildings on Cambridge Street which it had been occupying since 1890. Many changes were made, both exterior and interior, and additional land surrounding the building was purchased and landscaped attractively in 1929.

Early in World War II, the company again turned to the manufacture of war materials. A new method of making bronze and silver-clad bushings was developed, saving large quantities of critical materials. Navy flying-boat landing frames were produced from hard tempered aluminum, together with radar tuning devices, radar instrument panels and many other essentials for the war effort.

The plant was completely renovated in 1945, and a large





Chamberlain Heights, one of several public housing projects



A typical private development of modern homes





View from East Peak



Castle Craig





Mirror Lake, Hubbard Park





West Peak radio stations



Merimere Reservoir





Meriden Lions Club Pool, Hubbard Park





Meriden Municipal Golf Course



Tennis Instruction, Washington Park





Brookside Park



Baldwin's Beach





Meriden High School



John Barry School Addition



addition to house the plating room was constructed. Much new machinery and equipment were purchased and installed. The company today occupies over 40,000 square feet of floor space and employs between 350 and 500 persons, depending upon seasonal conditions. Its ivy-covered walls give it the appearance of a building on some college campus. The property, including 14 acres, is known as Napier Park. In 1955 the company received the American Nurserymen's "Plant America" award for its effective landscaping.

The Napier Company is the largest privately owned producer of fashion jewelry in the United States. It sells its products directly to retail stores, and maintains branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Napier jewelry was shown at the opening in Rome of the summer 1956 collection of gowns for the Fontana sisters. It was the first time that American-designed jewelry had been featured by a European couturier. In addition to jewelry, the company produces sterling silver, silverplated and gold-plated giftwares, including such varied gifts as bar accessories, smokers' accessories, and many other items.

#### THE CONNECTICUT TELEPHONE AND ELECTRIC CORPORATION

The Connecticut Telephone and Electric Corporation, now under new ownership and management, is an industry which has been established here for 62 years. It was formed in 1894 as a partnership between Ernest C. Wilcox and Burton L. Lawton for the purpose of manufacturing telephone instruments.

Originally, the business was conducted at the old Malleable Iron plant. Part of the present site on Britannia Street was purchased in 1903, and in that year the present name of the company was adopted. Later, the firm entered the automobile ignition field and, in 1913, became the largest manufacturer of automobile ignition systems in the world.

The company designed and manufactured portable antennae field sets for the War Department at a time when radio was still in its infancy. In 1920, it was cited by the War Department for service rendered during World War I.

In World War II, its services were also extensive in the precision manufacture of equipment used by the armed services, especially in the field of communications. Company and

employees were honored by the government for their war contributions.

The plant occupies a group of thoroughly modernized factory buildings on Britannia Street, which have grown from the original small factory.

In February 1956 the company was reorganized under the control of local interests. Its present officers are C. A. Schultz, president; H. B. Randall, vice president; H. N. Westhaver, vice president; J. E. Whisler, vice president; W. M. Schultz, treasurer; R. A. Schultz, assistant treasurer; C. W. Schultz, secretary. Randall, Westhaver and Whisler have been associated with the company for many years as executives.

The Schultz group owns the Silver City Glass Company, the Silver City Crystal Company and Radio Station WMMW in Meriden.

#### PRATT & WHITNEY AIRCRAFT DIVISION

The Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Division of United Aircraft Corporation is an acknowledged world leader in the design, development, and production of gas-turbine engines for aircraft. The Meriden branch is a leased facility occupying the former plant of Manning, Bowman & Co. at Pratt and Miller Streets. It was established here in 1951, and is used as an inspection center for parts, rough and finished, which go into P&WA engines.

The branch is under the direction of A. Lawrence Riker, chief inspector, branch plants, and head of the Meriden facility.

About 900 are employed here. The total of Meriden residents employed in all P&WA plants was 1,137 in March 1956.

There are 29 subcontractors or suppliers in Meriden from whom the division buys parts or supplies.

Manning, Bowman & Co., one of the old companies no longer in the local industrial picture, was established in 1859 by Thaddeus Manning in Cromwell. The plant was moved to Middletown at the close of the Civil War, and the business was brought to Meriden in 1872. Its field was the fabrication of quality metal products and the manufacture of electrical appliances. For many years the business prospered, and the plant was enlarged to cover two city blocks. Its later history was a story of decline under severe competitive conditions which finally forced the dissolution of the industry here.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

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### World War II

By 1941, the spreading conflagration in Europe had made it apparent that it was only a question of time before the United States would be starting counterblazes against aggression. Meriden industries had been engaged in some phases of defense production for at least two years. Early in 1940, military units from this city had been summoned into training. On February 24, 1940, the National Guard companies were inducted into service, and entrained for Florida early in March. The 118th Medical Regiment Band accompanied the other guardsmen.

The total registration for the first draft was 4,815 on October 16, 1940, and on October 29 the first drawing was held. The second draft, for those who had become 21 during the interim, was on July 17, 1941.

Organization of the city's defense effort proceeded rapidly after the appointment by Mayor Francis R. Danaher of a Defense Council, consisting of Captain John R. Feegel, chairman; Police Chief Michael B. Carroll, Fire Chief John F. Moroney, Harry S. Hanson, Boy Scout executive, Robert S. Kidder, John Holman, John N. Brusie, and Charles A. Newton, executive secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. Units for local defense were formed, and Spencer H. Miller became Chief Warden, with many committees under him serving in the various phases of the work. The city was divided into four zones, and many block wardens were enlisted in each zone. The volunteers were indoctrinated, through courses given in the City Hall auditorium, in what to do in case of attack.

But these foretastes of war conditions had hardly prepared the city for the shocking news which broke on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. War on Japan was declared the following day. The formal declaration of war on Germany and Italy was recorded December 11. Rumania declared war on this country on December 12, and Bulgaria on December 13. But the United States took no action on these two declarations until June 5, 1942, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked

for counterdeclarations, and Congress immediately complied.

The State Guard was called out for guard duty at defense plants on December 12, 1941, but was recalled after two weeks.

The whole country was aroused by the Pearl Harbor attack, and war sentiment was at fever heat. But the mood was even more grim than at the start of World War I, and there was much less of parading, but plenty of stern effort here.

On February 16, 1942, all males between 20 and 44 years old, and not already registered, were required to register, and 2,711 living here responded to the call. The list of numbers assigned was posted March 12, and the drawing was held in Washington on March 17. Number 441 was the first number drawn in District 13A. It was held by Stanley Zuckerman. The first number drawn in District 13B was held by the Rev. James J. O'Conner, who had been transferred, shortly before, to a church in Washington, D. C.

The fourth registration, for men from 45 to 65 years old, was held in April 1942. The registration for those from 18 to 20 years old followed on June 30.

Meriden had its first trial blackout on March 3, 1942. On March 18, the shortage of gasoline resulted in the rationing regulations effective during the remainder of the war period. Rationing of tires followed. Registration days for sugar and gasoline rationing were held in May at the schoolhouses, and coupon books were issued. The gasoline coupons were in different classes, and the allowances granted were measured according to the type of use of the car.

The war years that followed were well recorded in a unique journal sent out by the Meriden Center of the United Service Organizations to Meriden men and women in the service of their country. Written and compiled by Arthur L. Barber, general secretary of the Y.M.C.A., it was entitled *News From Home*. Its publication and distribution, under the same name and auspices, have continued since the war. In a format of only four typewritten pages, *News From Home* gives a condensed version of interesting and important news of Meriden from month to month. This first issue appeared in November 1943. It reported: "The fellow in his twenties who looks healthy feels as if he ought to be carrying a sign explaining that his liver and one kidney are missing — or something to that effect."

Scores of volunteers helped in the preparation and mailing of



this newsy sheet. In 1944 the Bradley Home staff took over the complete job.

The city rapidly became inured to war demands. Nearly every aspect of life had changed. The need for war workers in Meriden industry could not be supplied entirely by local residents, and thousands came here from other states. Most of them were snapped up immediately by eager employment managers. Housing to care for them became a paramount necessity. A survey was taken of boarding accommodations. The Gale Terrace temporary housing development was erected, and part of it was filled up at once by 60 Jamaicans brought here to ease the labor shortage. Later the number rose to about 250. One man advertised offering a war bond to anyone who would find him an apartment for rent.

Campaign followed campaign in rapid succession. Quotas were topped here in war loan drives, and Meriden more than once led all Connecticut cities in per capita sales of war bonds.

The city took good care of servicemen from other cities as well as the local servicemen who came home on leave. They were welcomed at the railroad station, provided with free overnight accommodations at the Y.M.C.A., given passes to theaters, dances, and bowling alleys.

There was no slacking in the almost universal war effort here. Hardly a day went by without the announcement of some new campaign. The agencies in the Community Fund were especially active, and hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised to meet their expanding needs. The USO had been added to the group, and its appeal was oversubscribed, along with the appeals of other organizations, including the Red Cross, which functioned for the benefit of the war effort.

The smooth integration of Meriden's response to the demands of war led to the most signal honor ever bestowed upon this city. After a careful examination of the claims of other cities, the Federal War Manpower Commission designated Meriden as "The Nation's Ideal War Community." This story broke on the first pages of newspapers across the country, and drew national attention to the manner in which the local war assignment had been carried out.

There was a story behind the story. The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer motion picture company had collaborated with the War Manpower Commission to produce a morale-building motion

picture entitled "Main Street Today." It was the second picture of this type produced by the company. Seeking for the proper community in which to hold the world premiere, the producers consulted War Manpower Commissioner Paul V. McNutt, and the choice fell on Meriden because it best met the standards which had been set up.

At that time, early in 1944, 80 manufacturing companies here were supplying the sinews of war on an enormous scale. Almost complete conversion to war production had been achieved. Wallingford and Southington in this area had more than 50 other plants engaged in war output. The local population had increased from about 40,000 at the beginning of the war to more than 46,000. The roll of war workers could muster at least 20,000, 54 per cent of whom were women. More than 5,000 Meriden men and women were serving in the various branches of the armed forces. At the same time, the home front was manned by nearly the entire resident population. Even those who had retired from employment years previously had found niches for usefulness.

There were other factors, too, which weighed in the selection of Meriden for this honor. One of the most important was the prevailing harmony in interracial and industrial relationships. More than 60 per cent of the people here were either foreign born or born of foreign or mixed parentage. These racial stocks had mingled without friction.

All Meriden plants except the International Silver Company, which had a special war set-up of its own, functioned through a labor-management committee. This committee operated to find transportation for war workers through car pools, to help in war bond drives, to work out traffic plans with the city, and to help solve numerous other problems. Interruptions of war production because of disputes over hours, wages, or working conditions were practically unknown. The committee promptly ironed out the troubles which arose. Most plants were working three shifts, and the average wage rates of Meriden and Wallingford combined were among the highest in the nation. Absenteeism was also non-existent.

This city was the perfect setting for what the War Manpower Commission had in mind, and Meriden responded to the news of its honor by preparing an elaborate program for the official celebration. A committee of community leaders was formed. All



local groups were represented. The churches played an especially important part, for Sunday, March 19, was designated as Civic Sunday, with non-sectarian worship in the City Hall at 7:30 p.m.

On Monday, March 20, Meriden gave its official reception for the Hon. Paul McNutt and the party which he had brought with him from Washington. Arriving at 5 p.m., he and the group were escorted on a series of plant inspections. This was followed by a dinner in the new cafeteria of the New Departure Division of General Motors. The entire proceeds from the sale of tickets to this affair went to the Meriden Chapter of the American Red Cross.

The New Departure plant was next inspected, and the party attended an exhibit of war products in the Y.M.C.A. Then, at 10:30 p.m., came the presentation of a program at the Loew-Poli Palace Theater. Again the Red Cross benefited by the proceeds.

Mr. McNutt spoke in the theater, and his message was broadcast to the country over the red network. Captain Glenn Miller's band furnished the music for the program. Hollywood stars Luise Rainer and Jimmie Durante made personal appearances.

Governor Raymond E. Baldwin represented the State of Connecticut on this occasion.

The Meriden Record and the Meriden Journal published special editions in connection with the event, and reported the proceedings in many columns of space, and the principal wire services carried liberal accounts to all parts of the country.

The official citation, embossed on a plaque presented to Mayor Francis R. Danaher, acting on behalf of the city, read:

"A Commendation to the City of Meriden for its outstanding achievements in the complete Mobilization of Manpower and every Home Front Resource to effectively speed the War Effort.

Paul V. McNutt

Chairman the Manpower Commission."

While all this was happening at home, Meriden men and women away from home were scattered all over the globe. The lessons of war training had long since been translated into combat experience for many. The war was being fought on many fronts: in the European theater, on isolated islands of the Pacific, in the Philippines, in the Far North, over the cold reaches of the Atlantic, around the British Isles, in North Africa, at the "soft under-belly" of Europe, and was creeping up to the shores of

Japan. Meriden soldiers, sailors, marines were engaged in practically all the phases of this unprecedented struggle, and were giving a good account of themselves. But the mounting casualty lists were bringing sorrow to many a Meriden home, and steeling the resolve of the city at large to pour all of its resources into the war effort.

The news of the invasion of Western Europe on D-Day was received here with prayer, not jubilation. Invasion services were held in all the churches. Work ceased in the factories while men and women at the bench bowed their heads and prayed.

Again the city went over the top in the Fifth War Loan drive in 1944, when \$10,355,766 was subscribed in Meriden, \$755,760 above the quota.

A second hurricane, somewhat less severe than the disastrous hurricane of 1938, hit here in September 1944, causing the loss of nearly 500 of the city's trees, putting more than 1,000 telephones out of business, causing a failure of electric power in many parts of the city.

This happened while the hurricane overseas was at its height.

Meriden servicemen were meeting in such far-off places as New Delhi, India, Italy, England, France, the Hawaiian Islands, New Guinea, on shipboard in the Pacific, in North Africa — and writing home of these and other war experiences. On the lighter side, a beard-raising contest promoted by the Y.M.C.A. produced some startling photographs of Meridenites who were barely recognizable behind their facial foliage.

The city in 1944 was already planning for its postwar development, and especially to welcome and care for the needs of returning members of the armed forces. Mayor Danaher appointed a Veterans' Service Commission for advisory purposes consisting of Joseph Bogucki, William Dibble, Harold Holmes, C. I. Packer, Fred Slagle, William J. Wilcox and Arthur L. Barber.

*News From Home* was being sent at this time to a considerable number of German and Japanese prisoners-of-war.

Early in 1945, the city exceeded its \$8 million quota in the Sixth War Loan by \$400,000. Calls for blood found ready response, and many on the home front gave until they were nearly "bled white."

The Meriden U.S.O. report in February showed that nearly



5,000 free showers had been provided by the Y.M.C.A. for servicemen, 1,500 of whom had been provided with lodgings, and that 37,000 news letters had been sent out during 1944.

A municipal youth canteen, the "Tally-Ho" was opened in the basement of the Welfare Building on Liberty Street.

In April 1945, the official records showed that 5,242 had left Meriden for war service.

Meanwhile, plans for postwar Meriden were progressing step-by-step. An architect was engaged to plan a \$1,500,000 high school — a plan later abandoned when the Board of Education decided to proceed first with the building of elementary schools before attempting the secondary schools phase of school construction. The old Rogers Block, long an eyesore in the center of the city, was removed. South Colony Street was widened at this point, and the loop system of traffic regulation was placed in effect. An option was obtained by the city to purchase a portion of the Lyon & Billard property for the purpose of widening Hanover Street, but the proposal was held in abeyance, and eventually the check given by the city was voided with the consent of the principals.

In the spring of 1945, victory was in sight, at least on the continent of Europe. The German armies began surrendering on May 4, and unconditional surrender was signed May 7 at Rheims headquarters and in Berlin. This news found Meriden still in a sober mood. Not a factory decreased operations. In fact, attendance on the job averaged even higher than usual. There were prayer services in every church on the evening of V-E Day, and a U.S.O. community prayer and song service in Crown Street Square.

At this time, Meriden was leading the state in the Seventh War Loan campaign. It had raised \$600,000 to increase the size of the Meriden Hospital with a new addition.

News that brought rejoicing was the release of a large number of Meriden men from German prison camps.

It was a tense summer here, as well as in all other parts of the country. The invasion of Okinawa on April 1 had been followed by 83 days of fighting. The first atomic bomb ever used in war was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, and complete victory over Japan was achieved with the surrender on August 14. The formal surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri took place

September 2, Far Eastern time — V-J Day.

A reminder of the sacrifices which war had meant was afforded by the dedication on July 17 of a memorial in Hubbard Park to Major Donald T. Robison, formerly park superintendent, who had given his life in the combat in the Pacific. On July 4, he was posthumously awarded the nation's third highest honor, the Legion of Merit. The memorial consisted of an inscribed boulder.

In common with most of the country, Meriden had two peace celebrations, the first premature on August 12, touched off by a wire-service dispatch which beat the formal announcement. Bells started ringing wildly, and a scene of wild jubilation began in the streets, lasting for about an hour before the dispatch was corrected. Two days later, following the official announcement, 10,000 persons jammed the downtown section. The occasion was unmarred by vandalism, but the crowds cut loose with songs and cheers. On August 15, a peace parade was held, and many took part in a block dance in Crown Street Square, to music from the Record's amplifier with borrowed records. The band engaged had failed to appear.

Ernest Kirby was engaged by the city in January 1944 to compile Meriden's war records, and his report was made first in July 1945. The following figures were taken from his statistics at that time: 5,631 inducted (of whom 4,879 were still in uniform in September 1945); 146 dead; 377 wounded; 28 prisoners (of whom 20 had returned by early August); 3,104 in the Army; 1,060 in the Navy; 171 Marines and 161 in other branches; 156 women in the armed services, of whom 56 were WACs, 39 Waves, 10 Spars, 39 Army nurses, 7 Navy nurses, with 5 discharged at the time when the first report was made. On December 1, 615 from here were still in the service.

Organized to advise the returning veterans was the Veterans' Advisory Center at 22 Liberty Street in the old high school building, then called the Welfare Building.

The Volunteer Office of the War Council was located in the same building. It was closed in October 1945, but Mrs. Matilda A. Young, who had been in charge of the office, was appointed secretary of the War History Office and continued the work of the Volunteer Office on a part-time basis.

Meriden residents who lost their lives in the service of their country in World War II were:



Albert R. Athorne	Francis E. Gaffey
Leonard Baranski	Carl A. Gardon
Emil E. Beierle	Raymond W. Gearing
Joseph E. Bergeron	Hugh R. Gibney, Jr.
William F. Berwick	Lawrence Gleason
Edward Bieluczyk	Howard T. Gracey
Arthur J. Biesak	Robert Gregory
Welles Bishop	Michael J. Grieco, Jr.
Vincent J. Blachuta	Robert W. Grinold
Mencseslaus Bogacz	Robert Halstein
James H. Brandenberger	Dana Harlow, Jr.
Fred Emil Brechlin	Wayne G. Havell
Frank Budzinack	Donald A. Hofmeister
Joseph J. Byczynski	August W. Horton
Joseph Cahill	Warren Hough
Albert Caivano	Harold Jobin
Vincent S. Cannatelli	George J. Kafka
William J. Carrozella	Walter W. Kaminsky
John T. Cashen	William Kapitzke
Paul Carl Chaya	Norman P. Kelly
Carl J. Ciasulli	Robert S. Kidder
Louis M. Cook	David M. Knell
William J. Cooper	Edward J. Koczon
Louis J. Corradino	John Kolek
Arthur H. Crooker	Frank P. Konopka
Jerome F. Curran	Walter Koozmitch
A. Morse Curtis, Jr.	Robert Kroeber, Jr.
Charles E. Cushing	Henry C. Landry
Henry A. Dahlke	John R. LaRosa
Ronaldo F. D'auria	Howard Lebo
Mark Daybill	Walter Lepack
John H. Dearborn	Benjamin L. Liber
Anthony Dlugolenski	Alexander Logoyke
Walter J. Douksza	Ernest Luca
Frank R. Dowling	Lionel J. Ludsier
George E. Dupuis	Robert E. Lynes
Manfred R. Falk	George S. Macri
Herman B. Faricelli	Joseph Paul Madona
Thomas M. Fitzgibbons, Jr.	Joseph Majewicz
Robert W. Fowler	Anthony Maletta

John J. Malm	Donald T. Robison
Nestor J. Malone	Joseph E. Rogers
William F. Malone	James Rosi
Francis R. Maney	Kenneth C. Runge
John F. Mason	Theodore J. Rzegocki
Paul E. McCarthy	Edward O. St. Onge
Wesley J. Meiklem	Joseph F. St. Onge
Dorrance Merriam	Joseph C. Saleski
Paul Mingrino	Bertrand K. Sawyer
Michael Molon	John V. Scarfo
Joseph Morelli	Francis J. Schaefer
Donald W. Moyer	Carl A. Scharmer, Jr.
Benjamin Muzyczka	Kenneth E. Smith
Julius A. Nessing	James V. Spinelli
Stanley J. Niewiadomski	Theodore T. Stafinski
Arthur Nitsche	Joseph A. Sullivan, Jr.
Russell P. O'Brien	Edward J. Szymaszek
Maurice O'Connell	Donald J. Teagle
Stanley Orzech	Albert J. Tetreault
Dominic Paluconis	Joseph J. Trigilio
Arthur Panciera	Harold C. Trostel
Everett Parrish	William R. Whalon
Herbert T. Perkins	Jack Williams
Theodore J. Pinkos	Edgar Worley
John Podgurski	Bronislaus Woronik
Irving C. Pohl	Herbert A. Wunsch
Bronislaus Przywara	Carlton W. Wusterbarth
Joseph S. Pulaski	Richard H. Young
Arthur J. Radtke	Raymond Zavaglia
Charles Rahner	Frank A. Zawacki
Robert Reilly	Rudolph J. Zebora
Edwin W. Ridley	Victor Leo Zlotowski
Robert I. Robinson	Edward J. Zuraw



## CHAPTER THIRTY

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### The Korean War

THE KOREAN WAR which followed World War II, has been described as a "police action" but its effects were those of all-out war, so far as this country was concerned. American soldiers fought and bled and died in large numbers, and at least 15 men from Meriden were among those who perished as a result of their service.

It is unnecessary to rehearse here the steps which led up to the conflict in which U. S. armed forces were involved, which began when the North Korean army invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. The Security Council of the United Nations demanded immediate withdrawal. When this was refused, the U. S. ordered Gen. Douglas MacArthur to send aid, and he was named commander in chief of the U. N. forces. Bitter fighting ensued, especially after 200,000 Red Chinese troops entered the war. The long combat was finally ended when an armistice was signed by the United Nations and the Communist delegates in Panmunjom on July 27, 1953.

In this war, which resulted in a stalemate, the following Meriden men died, according to records kept by the Record-Journal:

Francis H. Abele, killed in action in 1950; Robert P. Abele, killed in action in 1950; Malcolm E. Aldrich, listed killed in action in 1951; William H. Burke, lost at sea in 1950; Donald Dibble, reported missing in action in 1950, no subsequent report; Derrick Donovan, killed in action in 1951; Lorenzo Dupont, Jr., died of injuries in 1952 when hit by a car in Germany; Robert J. Gervais, killed in action in 1952; Burton A. Gracey, killed in action in 1951; Joseph C. M. Gravel, killed in action in 1951; Warren H. Leining, killed in action in 1950; Frank J. O'Brien, Jr., killed in a parachute jump in 1954; Joseph F. Owsianik, body found in San Francisco Bay in 1952; Robert M. Strauss, killed in plane crash in 1954; Joseph Zuber, killed in accident in 1951 at air force base in Texas.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

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### Labor Unions

AS EARLY AS 1880, individual trades here were organized into labor unions, but were not affiliated with any central body.

The Knights of Labor movement began to sweep the country in 1883, motivated largely by a desire for political influence. Almost anyone could be admitted to this organization except liquor dealers and lawyers. The reasons for their exclusion were not stated publicly.

Mechanics Assembly No. 2501 was instituted here in 1884 in Circle Hall on Colony Street as a unit of the Knights of Labor. Other units were soon formed in different trades, and the movement flourished for four years, but disintegrated in 1889, when the influence of the American Federation of Labor became dominant. The strong Buffers and Polishers Assembly here withdrew from the Knights of Labor to join the AFL, which led the way for many other local unions to follow.

The Central Labor Union was organized September 21, 1890, in Martin's Hall, State Street and soon gained strong support. John Reynolds was the first president. In 1906, 23 local labor organizations, representing every union in the city, were affiliated with this body and took part in the Centennial celebration.

The organization remained active and gained strength. It was instrumental in founding Undercliff Sanitarium, where beds were established for the care of union members or members of their families afflicted with tuberculosis.

In July 1915, the C. L. U. observed its 25th anniversary with a celebration at Hanover Park at which Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, spoke. Mr. Gompers was taken on a sight-seeing trip through Meriden by Thomas L. Reilly, then U. S. Representative; and Julius C. Stremlau, then president of the Connecticut Federation of Labor, introduced Mr. Gompers to the assembled unions. Meriden at that time had 2,500 members in unions affiliated with the Central Labor Union.

In 1944, the body moved its headquarters from 29 Colony Street, where it had been located for 44 years, to 72½ East Main



Street. During World War II, it set up a committee to give aid and advice to returning veterans. This was done in response to a request from the War Department, according to the late Frederick L. Neebe, long secretary of C. L. U. Serving on the committee were Henry J. Burke, president, John L. Moran, Joseph Bogucki, Ernest T. Bradley and John T. McGlew.

The office of the Central Labor Union is still at 72½ East Main Street and John T. McGlew is president. More than 20 AFL unions are affiliated.

Although the merging of the American Federation of Labor and Council of Industrial Organizations has been completed on a national level, they have not yet been combined on the state and local level, but this must be accomplished under the agreement within two years.

Only two local factories have CIO unions: the New Departure Division of General Motors Corporation and the Connecticut Telephone and Electric Corporation: the first, UAW, local 987, and the second the Electrical Workers Union.

It is planned to merge on a local level within a year, officials have stated.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

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### Public Utilities

#### ELECTRICITY AND GAS

IT WAS 70 years ago this year that electricity was first made available to Meriden people for lighting their homes, and 93 years ago that gas was piped into homes for illumination and heat.

The subsequent years have seen mighty developments in techniques and scope of service, thanks in large part to the integration of the Meriden utilities into the Connecticut Light & Power Co. network 30 years ago.

Whereas gas and electricity were both once produced locally at plants on South Colony Street, consumers of the Meriden area today burn gas which is a mixture of natural gas — coming to them directly by pipeline from Texas and other southwestern producing centers — plus locally manufactured gas. Similarly, Meriden consumers today use electricity manufactured by steam or water power at great power plants in the state, and soon will be using electricity generated of atomic fission in facilities to whose construction the Connecticut Light & Power Co. is contributing.

It was in 1863, during the Civil War, that gas was first introduced into Meriden. A small 30,000-cubic-foot gas holder stood on South Colony Street about opposite Gold Street. By 1875, the use of gas in Meriden had grown so substantially that a larger installation was necessary, and a new plant was constructed on Cooper Street on the site of the present CL&P facilities.

A large brick gas holder with a conical roof was built in 1875. This was capable of storing 100,000 cubic feet of gas, which seemed like an enormous amount at the time. By 1890, however, the holder was far too small and its walls were extended another 20 feet, thereby doubling its capacity. The old holder continued to serve for another decade or so, until 1901 when a much larger steel gas holder was erected. The brick gas holder remained on the premises until it was torn down in 1935.

Gas was made locally by burning soft coal. A by-product was



coke. During World War I and the years thereafter the local gas works were the mecca of Meriden boys sent by their families to draw home a bagful of coke on their hand express wagons. Coal was short in those days, and boys from many parts of the city made regular trips after school to the gas works, standing in line until the burlap bag which they brought was filled with coke which helped to keep the home fire burning.

The large telescopic steel tank which stood on the property on Cooper Street finally became inadequate, even though it held some 750,00 cubic feet of gas. In 1949 this tank gave way to the large steel globes called hortonspheres in which the Connecticut Light & Power Co. now stores a million cubic feet of gas each, under 60 pounds pressure.

The erection of the hortonspheres, largest in the world at the time of their erection, was just another step in the development of a gas service which provided not only Meriden, but also Middletown, Cromwell, Southington, and Cheshire with gas. Since September 1953 natural gas has been brought to Meriden by pipeline from the oil fields to be mixed with manufactured gas.

When gas was first introduced, it was largely for purposes of illumination in homes, stores, and on streets. As an illuminant, it displaced kerosene lamps which, in turn, had displaced candles. Even in the 1890's, after electricity had been introduced, some homes were piped for gas at the same time that they were wired for electricity. Today, of course, gas finds little use as an illuminant, but a great use industrially and an increasing use in home heating.

Meriden has had electric lights since 1886. Two men, Fuller and Wood, pioneered in electric lighting, starting with the old carbon arc light which persisted for many years as a street light. In 1885 Fuller and Wood set up a steam engine in the Lonigan building on State Street, until recently the headquarters of Miner, Read & Tullock. The steam engine powered an arc light machine. They had a few lights attached so that local citizens could see how they worked. Then the citizens were besought to form a local electric light company.

That is what happened in Meriden. E. A. Fitzgerald was Fuller & Wood's representative in Meriden. He set up three street lights as a demonstration, one at West Main and Butler, another at West Main and Colony Streets, and a third in Crown St. Square,

and he persuaded six local men to buy the plant. These men were Charles F. Linsley, Charles L. Rockwell, Abiram Chamberlain, E. B. Cowles, H. S. Geary, and John L. Billard. The men built a small building next to the warehouse, and set up two arc light machines, one for lighting stores, the other for the 30 street lights which they installed. That was in 1886. In 1887 they exchanged their stock for stock of the Meriden Gas Light Co., and two years later moved their plant to South Colony Street where electricity continued to be generated for the next 26 years.

Great changes took place in the field of electric illumination. Alternating current displaced direct current, and Thomas Edison invented the incandescent lamp which displaced the old arc lights. Edison showed his invention at the Columbia Exposition in 1893; five years later incandescent lighting was in use in Meriden.

It was in 1926 that the Connecticut Light & Power Co. entered the picture in Meriden by merger of the Meriden Gas Light Co., the Meriden Electric Light Co., the New Milford Electric Light Co., the Woodbury Electric Light Co., and the Westport Electric Light Co. J. Henry Roraback was president of the CL&P at that time.

Meriden's gas and electric companies have had an exceptional record of continuous management. Joseph A. Hadley was manager from 1865 to 1895. Charles A. Learned became manager in 1895 and continued until after the merger of the local companies with the CL&P Co. He was succeeded by Albert S. Jourdan of 30 Chestnut Street.

After Mr. Jourdan's retirement, James H. Doak, the present manager, was appointed.

#### TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS

Communication by telephone in Meriden has been possible for more than 78 years. A commercial telephone exchange was opened in Meriden on January 31, 1878, just three days after the world's first commercial telephone exchange was opened in New Haven, making Meriden the second city in the country to have commercial telephone service.

There were only six subscribers when the Meriden exchange first opened in 1878 under the management of Ellis B. Baker. Today there are more than 20,000 telephones in Meriden, according to Einer C. Setterling, Meriden manager of the



## Southern New England Telephone Co.

The story of the growth of the telephone in Meriden is one of steady progress. As the city grew, the telephone service grew, and new technical developments promptly found their way into the service in Meriden.

The switchboard used in Meriden, which is the oldest commercial switchboard still in existence ( the days-older New Haven switchboard having been destroyed) was built in the Edward Miller Co. in Meriden by Roger D. Blish. Today the old Meriden switchboard is on display in the Bell System museum in New York City.

Among the earliest subscribers who still use telephone service are the Miller Co., in whose shop the switchboard was built, the H. Wales Lines Co., and the Charles Parker Co. In their earliest days, telephones were largely an accommodation for commercial and industrial establishments; few homes had them at the beginning.

Mr. Baker and Mr. Blish, who put together the first switchboard in Meriden, used carriage bolts and the knobs from teapots for some of the fixtures which were mounted on a walnut panel about two by three feet in size. The office of I. L. Holt, insurance agent, in the Wilcox block, accommodated Meriden's first switchboard.

Shortly after the exchange was opened, it was moved to 10 Railroad Avenue in the rear of the coal office of Mr. Baker. In 1880, the exchange was located on the top floor of the Morse & Cook block. The name of the company was changed to the Connecticut Telephone Co. then and Elisha Ryder became the local manager. He subsequently moved his office to the loft over the Western Union Telegraph Co. office in the old railroad passenger station which stood in Winthrop Square, now the site of the Colony building, opposite the Winthrop Hotel.

Two years later, in 1882, the company was organized under its present name of the Southern New England Telephone Co. The office was moved to the second floor of the railroad station which preceded the present brick station. There the exchange remained until 1898 when it was shifted to the Lyon & Billard Co. building, and in 1904 to the building on South Grove Street now occupied by the State Employment Service.

All the changes of location were made in response to the need

of expanding service, and in April, 1925, the company moved to a fine new building on Butler Street. This building, much enlarged, is still the site of the company's local business office and operating quarters in Meriden. One of the principal expansions of the building came in 1950 when the business office was expanded. During the reconstruction, the business office occupied temporary quarters for some months at 67 East Main St., moving into its renovated quarters in December, 1950. The present two-story building will be raised to the height of four stories in 1957, according to plans recently announced. The enlargement will be made in anticipation of direct customer dialing on long distance calls, expected to be placed in effect here in 1958.

Technical progress in telephonic communications has been steadily reflected in the service of the Meriden exchange. As early as 1889 the first metallic circuits in the exchange were used, and the first long distance circuit of copper from New York to Boston was connected through the Meriden office in the same year.

At the turn of the century, and for a few years thereafter, telephone wires were strung overhead on poles bearing many crossarms. These were removed, and subsequently gave way to the underground conduits. Improved equipment, larger switchboards, greater speed in handling long distance calls, characterized the growth of the local exchange. In 1949 there occurred a major development in the cutover from manual operation to dial telephones. Up until that time all calls required the assistance of an operator. Now, under the dial system, only long distance calls require operator assistance, and soon even that will be reduced to a minimum.

When the Meriden exchange moved to its new quarters on Butler Street, the late Carl T. Kent was manager. He had come to Meriden in 1921, succeeding William Moran. Mr. Kent continued to serve here until 1947, when he was promoted to become assistant to the district commercial manager.

Succeeding Mr. Kent as manager was T. Valmonte Hedgpeth, who had been assistant manager. Mr. Hedgpeth continued as manager in Meriden until 1955 when he became supervisor of working practices at the New Haven headquarters. The present manager of the Meriden office, Mr. Setterling, came to Meriden in April, 1955.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

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### Meriden Newspapers

MERIDEN, Wallingford, Cheshire, and Southington form one contiguous area in the very heart of Connecticut. The four communities have kindred interests which bind them closely together.

Two modern daily newspapers serve this area — The Meriden Record and The Meriden Journal, both owned by The Meriden Record Company and published in the Record-Journal plant at Crown and Perkins Streets. More than 26,000 copies of the two newspapers, according to audited circulation figures, are distributed daily.

The newspapers had separate histories prior to June, 1949, when the Record purchased the Journal, and moved its entire staff across the street to become integrated with the dual enterprise of morning and afternoon publication under single ownership. Since that time, there has been constant improvement in the plant and in the quality of the newspapers. Structural and mechanical changes have been numerous and, at the same time, the volume of news and features published has been greatly increased, with corresponding increases in readership and advertising.

#### THE MERIDEN RECORD

The Meriden Record traces its beginnings to 1860, when its predecessor, the Meriden Republican, began as a weekly newspaper. Later, the Republican became an afternoon daily.

On November 28, 1888, a number of pioneers in local industry and banking took over the directorship of the newspaper corporation, the Republican Publishing Company. The group included Charles Parker, the city's first mayor, Nathaniel L. Bradley, C. F. Linsley, John L. Billard, William F. Rockwell, S. A. Hull, Horace C. Wilcox, W. F. Graham, and O. B. Arnold.

Four years later, William A. Kelsey, manufacturer of home printing presses, offered to assume the liabilities of the corporation in exchange for 60 per cent stock control, and the board was glad

to accept the offer. Its members had learned from experience that newspaper management was not their province.

Mr. Kelsey initiated new and successful policies. He appointed Thomas H. Warnock editor and Edwin E. Smith business manager, and gave them authority to conduct the newspaper according to their own ideas. At the time, he had already left Meriden to reside in Washington, D. C., which remained his home for the rest of his life.

The Record was started in 1892 as a one cent morning associate. In 1899, the two papers merged and became the Meriden Morning Record. The Republican was continued until March 1, 1899 as a weekly, and was then suspended.

The close association of Mr. Warnock and Mr. Smith endured for more than 40 years and was ended only by the death of one of the pair. Edwin E. Smith was made secretary of The Republican Publishing Company when it was incorporated in 1887, with William F. Graham as president. Mr. Graham resigned as president and treasurer the next year. He was editor and business manager of the Republican until his death May 18, 1891, when Mr. Warnock became editor. Tom Warnock, the first editor of The Record, had gained his newspaper experience under Mr. Graham, by whom he had first been employed in 1886. Mr. Smith and Mr. Warnock worked together in building the newspaper to a position of prestige and leadership until Mr. Smith's death in 1934.

William A. Kelsey became president of the corporation in 1905, and Mr. Smith was elected vice president and treasurer. Shortly afterwards, he was named publisher. After his death, his son, Wayne C. Smith, became general manager, and later publisher. Mr. Kelsey served as president from 1905 to 1931, when he was succeeded by Mr. Warnock as president. In 1948, Wayne C. Smith was elected president and Mr. Warnock became chairman of the board. The company changed its name to The Meriden Record Company to conform to the name of the newspaper.

Mrs. Blanche Hixson Smith, wife of Publisher Wayne C. Smith, joined the editorial staff of the Record in 1940, writing book and theatrical reviews and editorials. After the purchase of the Journal, she became executive editor of both newspapers. Carter H. White, her son, an attorney, vice president and general counsel of the corporation and active in the direction of its



affairs since 1948, is now the assistant publisher and general manager of the Record and the Journal. After the death of Mr. Warnock in 1952, Warren F. Gardner, who had been managing editor under him, was raised to the position of editor.

Assisting in the editorship of the Record for more than 40 years was Julia Lansing Hull Warnock, who served as associate editor, book and music critic, and editorial writer. She retired from active newspaper work in 1943, shortly after her marriage to Mr. Warnock. Her death preceded his by only a few months.

The first home of the Record was on Veteran Street in the building which has been occupied for many years by the Meriden Boys' Club. However, the Meriden Republican began operations on East Main Street at the corner of Veteran Street. The present main building, designed as a newspaper plant, was erected in 1905, but has been greatly altered and enlarged, with an addition housing the garage, heating plant, and paper storage, while complete modernization, both mechanical and in office quarters, and the addition of executive offices, has taken place. A new 40-page Hoe press was installed in 1948 in the enlarged press-room. The latest mechanical processes are used in the production of both newspapers, including the automatic setting of type by means of teletypesetter tape punched on special machines. The Record also receives the Associated Press wire service on tape.

#### THE MERIDEN JOURNAL

The Meriden Journal was first published April 17, 1886 in the Russell building on South Colony Street next to the Armour plant. It was founded by Francis Atwater, Lew Allen, Thomas L. Reilly and Frank E. Sands, four young men with slender capital which was almost absorbed by the first month's rent. Mr. Atwater, a practical printer, was in charge of the mechanical processes; Mr. Sands handled business details and solicited advertising; Mr. Allen was editor, and Mr. Reilly acted as city editor and reporter as well. The growth of circulation was so rapid that a new press became necessary in the fall of 1886.

The quarters in the Russell building were too small, and the firm leased a three-story wooden building on the edge of Harbor Brook from Morse & Cook. This building was occupied in 1888. A year later, the company purchased the building and proceeded

to erect a fireproof printing plant around the old wooden structure, continuing daily publication while the work was in process. An office was established on East Main Street where the Puritan Bank & Trust Company is now located, and was connected to the mechanical plant. In 1912, an office building was erected on property purchased from the H. Wales Lines Company, and the two buildings were joined.

Mr. Atwater sold his interest in the company and retired in 1913, and Mr. Sands became president and publisher. Before that time, both Mr. Allen and Mr. Reilly had retired, the latter to become congressman and later sheriff of New Haven County. C. Howard Tryon purchased an interest in 1915, was elected treasurer and named business manager. Sanford H. Wendover, who joined the company in 1916 as telegraph editor, became secretary and advertising manager. Later, Mr. Tryon was elected president, and also served as publisher. In 1943, Mr. Sands was elected chairman of the board and Mr. Wendover vice president to succeed Walter Allen, son of Lew Allen, who had been vice president as well as managing editor for many years. Mr. Allen then retired.

The Journal was published continuously in the two buildings until it was purchased by The Meriden Record Company in 1949. But it did not lose its identity through the sale. Its editorial and news staffs are entirely separate from the Record staffs, working at different hours, and its editorial page represents the views of its own editors.

Mr. Sands, who had spent his entire business lifetime in the conduct of the Journal, died in 1951. His death took the last of the newspaper's founders. Mr. Tryon remained as assistant publisher until 1950, when he retired. Mr. Wendover, who had been editor of the Journal since 1946, has continued in that capacity since the change. He is now the only former executive of the Journal Publishing Company still active in newspaper work.

The Meriden Record Company sold the two buildings it had bought from the Journal to the Meriden Savings Bank. The bank remodeled the former office building as an enlargement of its banking quarters at East Main and Crown Streets, and the two buildings were connected. The former mechanical plant of the Journal was torn down early this year.



## OTHER MERIDEN NEWSPAPERS

The Northern Literary Messenger, published by O. G. Wilson, was the first newspaper printed in Meriden. The date of the first issue is in doubt, but a copy of a later issue, February 3, 1849, bore the imprint Volume IV, indicating that it began late in 1844. It claimed to be edited "by an Association of Gentlemen." Publication was suspended in 1849.

The second newspaper was the Meriden Weekly Mercury, published by O. G. Wilson and George W. Weeks as a successor to the Messenger. The Mercury's plant was destroyed by fire about six weeks after it was started in 1849. The length of its life after that time is unknown.

The Connecticut Organ was first published in 1851 by Franklin E. Hinman and O. H. Platt. Hinman was the printer and Mr. Platt, later to become famous in politics, was the editor. The paper was sold in 1852 to James N. Phelps & Co. The date when it ceased publication is uncertain.

The Connecticut Whig was next on the newspaper scene. R. W. Lewis and O. H. Platt were its publishers, and Mr. Platt was also editor. The paper was discontinued about 1854.

During the same period, the Meriden Transcript was published by Lysander R. Webb & Co. When the Whig was suspended, Mr. Platt became editor of the Transcript, which lasted until August 1856. At that time, Mr. Platt's increasing practice as a lawyer and his budding interest in politics influenced his withdrawal from the newspaper business.

Robert Winston, a Canadian, came to Meriden in 1856 and established a weekly called the Meriden Chronicle which lasted for three years. It was purchased by A. B. Stillman who established the Meriden Banner, which had the brief life of four weeks.

From then until 1863 Meriden was without a newspaper. On August 29 of that year Luther G. Riggs started the Meriden Literary Recorder.

All of the newspapers mentioned were weeklies. The first daily was the Meriden Visitor, which began as the Weekly Visitor on March 21, 1867, but changed to a daily on January 1, 1868. Only three months later it was merged with the Weekly and Daily Republican, published at first by Marcus L. Delavan and George Gibbons, and later by William F. Graham.

Luther G. Riggs was interested in several short-lived newspapers in addition to the Recorder. Among his other ventures were the Daily News, the Evening Recorder, and the Morning Call.

The Penny Press, established by J. H. Mabbett in December 1881, became the Evening Press the next year, and, on October 16, 1882, consolidated with Riggs' Daily and Weekly Recorder. Under the name of the Press-Recorder, it continued until 1884. For a brief period in 1872, William F. Graham published a newspaper called the Evening Monitor, which was soon merged with the Republican.

The Meriden Evening Times was started May 22, 1905, backed by Henry C. L. Otto, who had no previous experience in the newspaper business. Local investors lost about \$30,000 in this venture, which lasted less than 10 months.

The last casualty in the local newspaper field occurred when the Meriden News-Digest ceased publication in April 1954. This newspaper was the successor to the Meriden Star, a weekly established June 15, 1950 with the backing of the International Typographical Union after members of its local had walked out of the Record-Journal plant. On July 17, 1951, the format was changed from the orthodox page size to tabloid size. Before the end, when the union had tired of enormous expenditures and the rapidly mounting losses from the operations, efforts were made unsuccessfully to attract local capital. The plant on South Colony Street was closed and the equipment offered for sale. The final edition appeared April 23, 1954.

The Independent, published by Robert L'Heureux, a former employee of the News-Digest, was started here as a weekly on May 20, 1954.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

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### Financial Institutions

ONE OF the more important factors responsible for Meriden's continuing growth and prosperity is the stability of its financial institutions. Sound in the beginning, they have remained sound through good times and bad. The worst periods of depression have not weakened them materially. There has never been an instance of a major bank failure here.

The thrifty habits of Meriden citizens are reflected in steadily increasing savings accounts and in a large percentage of individual home ownership. Business and industry are able to depend upon the local banks for current financing and assistance in expansion.

The total assets of the nine institutions, as of December 31, 1955, were \$112,272,048.22, not counting the trust funds in their keeping. Included in this figure are the assets of the Home National Bank and Trust Company; the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company, East Main and West Main branches; the Puritan Bank and Trust Company; the Meriden Savings Bank; the City Saving Bank; the Meriden Permanent Savings and Loan Association; the First Federal Savings and Loan Association, and the Meriden Trust and Safe Deposit Company.

#### HOME NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST COMPANY

The Home National Bank and Trust Company completed its first century in 1954, and held a special observance at the time of its annual meeting, January 12, 1955.

A group of local businessmen met in 1854 to form a bank for "home benefit," and the result was the "Home Bank of West Meriden," which became the Home National Bank of Meriden on January 6, 1865 and the Home National Bank and Trust Company of Meriden on February 1, 1947. In the year when it was founded, the population of Meriden was 3,559. The course of business was steadily westward to concentrate in the vicinity of the railroad. The bank was started with an initial subscription of \$100,000. Its first quarters were in rented rooms of the Young Men's Institute in the Collins Block on the east side of Colony

Street. Two years later, in 1856, it was moved across the street to the present location at Church and Colony Streets. The building was owned by Henry Butler, and the bank purchased it from him in 1858 for \$3,750. In 1863, this old wooden structure was removed, and the bank opened a large, new brick building, erected on the same site to house its growing activities. At the same time, the land immediately south was sold for \$3,000, so the corner property was obtained at a net cost to the stockholders of \$750. The original wooden building was moved to the corner of Camp and Colony Streets, where it stood for many years.

The brick building erected in 1863 had been outgrown 20 years later, and was completely remodeled in 1885.

Again, in 1921, the bank's directors agreed that larger banking quarters were necessary. The brick building, occupied for 59 years, was moved to the adjacent lot in the rear at 14½ Church Street, and rechristened the Central Building. The present bank building was erected on the corner site and opened in 1922. Several times since, the quarters have been expanded. In 1949, the main office was enlarged by the addition of a south wing, and in 1952 a modernization program was completed to provide more space for the bookkeeping department. In 1954, the main office was connected with the building at the rear.

On June 2, 1946, an office was opened in Cheshire in rented quarters. The response was gratifying, and in 1953 the bank erected a colonial type brick building to serve Cheshire's banking needs.

In Meriden, an uptown office was opened in leased quarters at 489 Broad Street on February 1, 1950.

S. W. Baldwin was the first president of the bank and A. C. Wetmore its first secretary. The original directors were Julius Pratt, S. W. Baldwin, Eli Butler, Henry C. Butler, James S. Brooks, Howell Merriman, A. C. Wetmore, James A. Frary and Fenner Bush. The first cashier was H. C. Young. Among these names will be recognized men who played a large part in the development of Meriden around the middle of the last century and later.

Eli Butler became president in 1856 and Abiram Chamberlain succeeded to that position in 1881 after Mr. Butler's death. He served 30 years as president, and was elected Governor of Connecticut in 1902 while holding the presidency of the bank.



The fourth president was Junius Norton, elected in 1911. After his death in an automobile accident, Edgar J. Doolittle, a well-known local manufacturer, was elected president in 1913. Charles S. Perkins became president in 1926, after Mr. Doolittle's death. George J. Sokel was elevated to the presidency in 1934, when Mr. Perkins died. The late Arthur S. Lane was then elected to the new office of chairman of the board.

The assets of the bank, as of December 31, 1955, were \$25,046,802, a figure which tells its own story of growth under sound management.

#### CONNECTICUT BANK & TRUST COMPANY

Through merger of the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company and the Phoenix State Bank and Trust Company of Hartford in 1954, the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company was created. The East Main and West Main branches of the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company then became branches of the consolidated institutions under the new name. Separately, their identities date back to much earlier periods in Meriden history, when they were known respectively as the Meriden National Bank and the First National Bank.

The Meriden National Bank, now the East Main Branch, is the oldest bank in Meriden. It was chartered by the General Assembly in June 1833, and began business with a capital of \$100,000 in the dwelling of William Yale at 447 Broad Street. The following year, a new brick bank building was erected at 529 Broad Street, on the east side of the street, a short distance north of East Main Street. The two-story brick building, with white columns supporting the porch over the colonial doorway, later became the residence of Hermon E. Hubbard.

The first board of directors consisted of Silas Mix, Samuel Yale, Elisha Cowles, Stephen Taylor, Ashabel Griswold, James S. Brooks, Noah Pomeroy, John D. Reynolds and Walter Booth. Ashabel Griswold was the first president and Francis King the first cashier.

In 1836, the bank's capital was increased to \$150,000. General Walter Booth became president and Harry Hayden was named cashier after Mr. King's death in 1837.

Noah Pomeroy, Joel H. Guy and Joel I. Butler were other

early presidents. Owen B. Arnold, who followed Mr. Butler in office, was president until his death in 1900.

The bank remained on Broad Street more than 50 years. In 1885, it moved downtown to occupy the four-story brick building on East Main Street where it has been located ever since. Judge Levi E. Coe became president in 1900, and died in 1905, when he was succeeded by George M. Clark, who held the office until his death in 1916. In that year, Herman Hess was elected president. He was followed in that office by Harris S. Bartlett, who was succeeded in 1935 by Burton L. Lawton.

In May 1946, when Harold F. Merz was president, the stockholders of the Meriden National Bank voted to transfer all the bank's assets and good will to the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company. Mr. Merz was retained as vice president of the Hartford Connecticut Trust Company and manager of the East Main Branch. Today, he is vice president and manager of both the East Main and West Main branches of the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company. Howard F. Buttner, assistant vice president, is stationed at the East Main Branch.

In November 1955, plans were announced by Lester E. Shippee, chairman of the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company, to erect a modern addition to the East Main Branch. It will adjoin the present building, and will occupy land in front of the Main Street Baptist Church. The bank has owned this site, at the corner of East Main and Crown Streets since 1945. The new building will be of modern design, with the use of much plate glass, and will have a sidewalk teller's window.

The First National Bank, now the West Main Branch, was established in 1863. Its original location was approximately the site of the present building, which it shares with the City Savings Bank and the Meriden Trust and Safe Deposit Company. The small wooden structure, which it occupied when it started, was replaced by a brick building in 1872. When the City Savings Bank was organized in 1874, it located in the same building. The Meriden Trust and Safe Deposit Company became the third occupant of this building when it was organized in 1889. Additional room was required by all three institutions, and the entire building was reconstructed in 1939. It was opened for public inspection on January 20, 1940, and began business in its new quarters immediately afterward.



The West Main Branch is on the west side of the main lobby, and the City Savings Bank on the east. The Meriden Trust and Safe Deposit Company has its quarters at the rear.

Joel H. Guy was the first president of the First National Bank. John D. Billard succeeded to the presidency in 1881 after the death of Mr. Guy. After Mr. Billard's death, Charles F. Rockwell, who had been cashier, became president and served until his death in 1923. He was succeeded by Floyd Curtis, with Ray E. King as cashier. After the absorption of the First National Bank by the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company in 1933, Mr. Curtis was elected vice president in charge of the local branch. Mr. King was elected assistant vice president. Wilber W. Gibson at that time became chairman of the advisory board, consisting of local men.

Mr. King has since retired, and Harold F. Merz is assistant vice president in charge, with the East Main branch also under his supervision. Dudley A. Dutton and Eric A. Walther are assistant vice presidents.

The combined assets of the two branches, as of December 31, 1955, were \$8,840,064.22.

#### PURITAN BANK AND TRUST COMPANY

The Puritan Bank and Trust Company had its origin when the state legislature authorized its incorporation in 1907. The incorporators were Francis Atwater, Dr. Frederick L. Murdock, Henry T. King and Charles C. Glock.

The first meeting of the incorporators took place in August 1912, five years after the legislature had taken action. The incorporators then voted to solicit subscriptions to the stock of the proposed new bank, the shares to be sold at \$100 par value.

One hundred and eighty-three subscribers took up \$54,700 in stock, which was later raised to an even \$55,000, and the bank was launched. In 1928, the capital was increased to \$75,000, and, in December of the same year, was stepped up to \$100,000. The capital stock of the bank is now \$150,000, the last change in capital structure having been made in 1945. The bank has been a member of the Federal Reserve system since 1941, and all its deposits are insured.

The first meeting of the stockholders was held October 10, 1912, with Gilbert Rogers as temporary chairman and Francis

Atwater as clerk. By-laws were adopted at that meeting, and the following directors elected: Frank D. Smith, C. F. Fox, William T. McKenzie, John R. Barnes, William A. Kelsey, Herbert Mills, Gilbert Rogers, Hermon E. Hubbard, Lewis E. Clark, Henry C. Bibeau, John R. Williams, D. M. Begley, H. W. Morse, Dr. E. W. Smith and Sylvester Moscaletis. Gilbert Rogers was elected the first president, and H. E. Kneath treasurer and secretary.

The bank began business in an old wooden building at 27 East Main Street. At the end of the first year, its resources were \$233,306.24. In 1914, Mr. Rogers resigned as president, and C. E. Schunack was elected to succeed him. After Mr. Schunack's death in 1927, W. S. Alexander, who had been treasurer of the bank since 1921, was elected president. In 1936, Clarence S. Powers, who had been a director of the bank since 1928, and who had served for a year as vice president, was elected to succeed Mr. Alexander, who had resigned as president and moved away from Meriden.

Today the bank is at the same location which it has occupied since 1912, but its quarters have been completely modernized. In 1924, the old wooden structure was replaced from foundation to roof and made into a modern, fireproof building. A new facade of Indiana limestone and granite was installed, and the interior was completely rearranged. A new vault was also installed. Changes made since that time have kept pace with the institution's growth and needs.

As of December 31, 1955, the assets of the Puritan Bank and Trust Company were \$3,718,884.49.

#### THE MERIDEN SAVINGS BANK

The Meriden Savings Bank received its charter on July 16, 1851, which had been granted by the state on July 12. At its first meeting, Enos H. Curtiss was elected president, Benjamin H. Catlin vice president, and Julius Pratt, Charles Parker, Lewis Yale, Joel H. Guy, Edwin E. Curtiss, Curtis L. North, David N. Ropes, Howell Merriman, and Henry W. Saltonstall as directors. On July 21, three vice presidents were added: Walter Booth, Elah Camp, and Ashbil Griswold.

It was voted to locate the bank at the home of Joel H. Guy on Broad Street. Mr. Guy was the first treasurer, and also held the office of secretary.





The Benjamin Franklin School





Roger Sherman School Addition



The Nathan Hale School





The Israel Putnam School  
Parker Avenue





Curtis Memorial Library



The Home Club





The Meriden Post Office



Curtis Home for Aged Women





First Methodist Church



Temple B'Nai Abraham





Masonic Temple



Elks' Clubhouse





The Bradley Memorial Home



Corner of Campus, Connecticut School for Boys



On August 2, 1851, the first actual deposit, amounting to \$100, was made by Asahel H. Curtiss. The first loan was to Wesley M. Johnson on house and land at the corner of Liberty and Center Streets.

In 1854, the bank moved to the Coe building on the southwest corner of East Main and Broad Streets, next to the Center Congregational Church. This building stood until 1894, when it was condemned and torn down to widen the corner.

In 1864, the bank moved to the Town Hall, and used its vault for the safekeeping of its securities. In 1870, E. E. Curtiss, Eli Butler, and I. C. Lewis, a committee appointed to obtain a new location, recommended the purchase of the P. J. Clark property, at the corner of East Main and Veteran Streets. The bank occupied the west store in this building until 1882, when the building was moved back on Veteran Street and a new structure erected in its place. This brick block remained the bank's quarters until July 1925, when the new banking house erected at East Main and Crown Streets was formally opened.

From 1851, the following have served as presidents of the Meriden Savings Bank: Enos H. Curtiss, 1851-1854; and again from 1857 to 1862; Benjamin H. Catlin, from 1854 to 1857; Edwin E. Curtiss, from 1862 to 1881; Levi E. Coe, from 1881 to 1903; John L. Billard, from 1903 to 1914; Eugene A. Hall, from 1914 to 1923; John G. Nagel from 1923 to 1941, and Llewellyn A. Tobie from 1941 to date.

Like all chartered Connecticut savings banks, the Meriden Savings Bank is a mutual institution, owned by its depositors. Its assets, as of December 31, 1955, were \$23,485,682.03. Through mortgage loans made on local property it has contributed greatly to the growth of the city during its life span of nearly 105 years.

#### THE CITY SAVINGS BANK

The City Savings Bank was organized in 1874. The original incorporators were Joel H. Guy, Charles L. Upham, John C. Byxbee, Jared R. Cook, John D. Billard, John Tait, H. L. Schleiter, George W. Smith, William H. Miller, A. C. Wetmore, Ratcliff Hicks, J. S. Wightman, Randolph Linsley, William Lewis, E. B. Everitt, and Gilbert Rogers.

Joel H. Guy was the first president, and upon his death in 1881, John D. Billard was elected to the presidency, serving until his

death in 1902. Charles L. Rockwell, who had been treasurer, was his successor. Frederick H. Billard succeeded Mr. Rockwell as president, and held that office until 1944, when he was elected to the office of chairman of the board of directors. Harold L. Wheatley, who has served the bank continuously since 1898, was chosen to succeed him.

Mr. Billard held the office of chairman until his death. Mr. Wheatley continued as president until the annual meeting on January 19, 1955, when Henry L. Ketelhut, who had been associated with the bank for 35 years, was elected president, and Mr. Wheatley became chairman of the board.

The first annual meeting of the bank was held July 1, 1875, when deposits of \$20,418.03 were reported, with 185 separate accounts. Assets as of December 31, 1955 were \$12,760,162.37.

The bank has always assisted in home financing for responsible persons on a sound basis, and its mortgage loans have done much toward building the community to its present size. Steadily increasing deposits over the years testify not only to the thrift of Meriden people, but to their satisfaction in the service rendered.

#### THE MERIDEN TRUST AND SAFE DEPOSIT COMPANY

Quartered in the same building with the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company and the City Savings Bank, the Meriden Trust and Safe Deposit Company was organized in 1889 by Walter Hubbard, Charles L. Rockwell, Charles F. Linsley, Isaac C. Lewis, John L. Billard, Nathaniel L. Bradley, John D. Billard, George R. Curtis, and Charles Parker. These men, all community leaders of their time, had in mind the growing need for a permanent institution to act as executor, administrator, guardian, and trustee of estates. A special charter was obtained from the legislature incorporating the company. Isaac C. Lewis was the first president, succeeded in turn by Walter Hubbard, Charles L. Rockwell, and W. B. Church, who still holds the presidency.

The company has gained a wide reputation for careful, responsible management of estates. Serving on its board today, as in the past, are men identified with some of the most important interests in the city.

The vault, with full safety equipment, offers complete safety-deposit protection.

The assets of the company, as of December 31, 1955, were



\$319,145. Trust funds amounting to \$23,429,090 were under the care of the institution on that date.

#### THE MERIDEN PERMANENT SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATION

The Meriden Permanent Building and Loan Association was organized September 28, 1888. The change in name, substituting the word "savings" for "building," was made last year. The association was incorporated in 1889. The incorporators were Dr. C. H. S. Davis, Orlando Burgess, John Webb, W. W. Mosher, Robert Bowman, William H. Miller, William G. Hooker, W. H. Bulmer, Thomas Vernon, Charles L. Hinman, Albert Furniss, Oliver McCarthy, William H. Neibour, E. G. Pepper, Charles C. Powers, Benjamin Page, H. K. White, E. A. Chapman, and Frank A. Camp. O. W. Burgess became the first president, John Webb, secretary, and W. W. Mosher, treasurer. The first quarters were in the old Byxbee Block in 1889. In 1894, the offices were removed to the Wilcox Block and remained there until the present banking building on Colony Street was constructed. The building was opened for business on March 17, 1922.

Leonard S. Savage, who retired in 1929, was secretary of the institution for 38 years. He died in 1932.

W. M. Miles was president at the time when the present building was opened, succeeding D. F. Powers in that office in 1922. After the death of Mr. Miles in 1938, Irving J. Meiklem was elected president to succeed him, and still holds that office. Albert J. Lirot is vice president and secretary.

In 1950, the banking quarters of the institution were completely remodeled. The front and main floor were rebuilt, and a new facade and vestibule were installed. An addition was also constructed at the rear. A new vault was another feature of the modernization program.

On April 1, 1955 an important addition to the association's property was recorded when it took title to land and buildings on Colony Street between its headquarters and the driveway of the Post Office on the north. On the property was the office building of the W. H. Squire Company, which it vacated, removing to 204 Colony Street. The old Collins residence, which had been remodeled for office tenants, was part of the deal concluded with the Meriden Title Finance Corporation, Mrs. Robert A. Squire, and Mrs. Roger W. Squire.

The Collins home was long the residence of Miss Sarah E. Collins, who died in 1949. It was built the year she was born, 1859. The land on which it stood was originally part of the Brooks farm, a portion of which was sold by Judge James S. Brooks, Miss Collins' maternal grandfather, to provide the railroad with a right of way.

In September 1955, the association received a permit to erect a \$71,000 one-story addition to its facilities, on the land purchased in April. Removal of the Collins home provides space for a 37-car parking lot. A drive-in window for the convenience of shareholders and savers, reached by means of a horseshoe-shaped driveway, is a feature of the plan. The new addition joins the building on the north side. The assets of the association have increased by more than \$5 million in the last four years, making the expansion necessary. As of December 31, 1955, they were \$16,991,315.17.

#### FIRST FEDERAL SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATION

The First Federal Savings and Loan Association was originally the Fourth Meriden Building and Loan Association, formed in 1900.

The late Fred Mills was president for many years, and was succeeded after his death by his son Stanley Mills. Leo E. Weisleder was elected president in 1935. He was succeeded by H. Dudley Mills, who had long been executive secretary of the association.

The original office was part of the office of the W. H. Squire Company, when it was located in the Byxbee Block, and collections were made there on Tuesday nights. Later, offices were located in the Morse and Cook Block and the Hall and Lewis Building, now the Cherniack Building. Steadily increasing business produced the need for a larger and permanent home, and the association in 1926 purchased a building on Church Street from Lew Miller, building contractor, who had used it as his own headquarters. The building was remodeled, and served until it was decided in 1940 to erect a new building on the site, and the old building was razed.

The formal opening of the new banking quarters took place on July 12, 1941. It is a modified Georgian type, of brick construction, with limestone and artificial stone trim. At the time,



the facilities were thought to be ample, but expansion was required in less than a decade. In 1949, plans were announced by Mr. Mills to construct an addition to double the floor space of the institution, by utilizing the entire rear parking lot and driveway, thus gaining space 30 by 40 feet. Space in the front formerly occupied by offices was added to the lobby. The completely remodeled building was opened in April, 1950.

In 1936, the conversion of the Fourth Meriden Building and Loan Association into the First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Meriden took place, when a charter was issued by the Federal Government, gaining more diversified plans of savings, and insurance of all accounts. A direct mortgage reduction plan was instituted at that time.

In his annual report on January 18 this year, Mr. Mills pointed out that the association, entering its 55th year, had increased its savings accounts to more than three times the total of 10 years ago. At the end of 1955, savings amounted to \$17,951,503.60, with 18,500 savings accounts in Meriden and the branch in Cheshire operated by the institution. Assets as of December 31, 1955 were \$21,109,992.94.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

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### Retail Business

MERIDEN IS a shopping center for this part of Connecticut. Located almost exactly in the geographical center of Connecticut, on the main line of the New Haven Railroad, with bus service from all directions and excellent highways and parkways to and through the city, its accessibility is a prime advantage for area shoppers.

But accessibility by itself does not account for the large volume of business done annually by Meriden retail stores. Local merchants are, for the most part, alert and progressive. Nearly every older store in or near the center has been altered in recent years to bring it up to date. Many new stores have come into the retail picture since the end of World War II. The style element in merchandise has become increasingly important. Prices and values compare favorably with the offerings presented in much larger cities. Courteous consideration for the customer's needs is stressed everywhere.

The city has cooperated with the merchants by providing convenient municipal parking areas on Church Street, in the new yard between South Grove Street and Butler Street, on South Colony Street, and on Colony Street north of the Post Office. In addition, there are parking areas in connection with a number of stores and privately operated yards where parking space is available for a small fee.

The curbs in the business district are metered, to prevent the monopolization of space and give short-time shoppers a place to park.

The Merchants' Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce, to which 45 local business firms belong, conducts various shopping events throughout the year and helps to keep retail standards high.

It is not the purpose of this volume to list all of the Meriden stores which have come and gone in the last 150 years, or even to mention all that are here at present. Space does not permit any such enumeration. The best that can be done is to give briefly the histories of some of the older establishments.



Upham's Department store is by far the oldest of these. It traces its origin back to "Squire" Eli Birdsey, shrewd pioneer of the uptown district, who opened a store near the intersection of Broad and East Main Streets in 1836. When the business center drifted westward, the firm of Ives, Upham & Rand opened a store on Colony Street. This was soon after the Civil War, when Col. Charles L. Upham and Lieut. Philip C. Rand became partners of John Ives, who had worked for Mr. Birdsey in the uptown store. When the Winthrop Hotel Block was erected in 1883, the store moved there, and, in 1909, purchased land to the north and erected a large addition. Additional land to the north of the building was acquired in 1913. Col. Upham, who had served brilliantly in the Civil War, who had held the office of mayor, and who had taken part in many civic enterprises, died in 1929. The business was carried forward by his three sons, Charles L., Francis C., and William H. Upham.

Boynton's, Inc., large ready-to-wear store for men and boys, was founded in 1902 as the Besse-Boeker Company. For many years, it was at 19 Colony Street. In 1920, the present four-story and basement building was erected on the site of the old Meriden Y.M.C.A. building. Arthur E. Boynton came here soon after the business was opened, and became the resident managing partner. The store was then known as the Besse-Boynton Company. Carlton P. Spear, Mr. Boynton's half-brother, became associated with the firm, and united with him in purchasing the business from the estate of Lyman Besse in 1930. Later, Clarence E. Carr obtained an interest, and Mr. Spear's son, Lewis M. Spear, also became an executive in the business.

Samuel L. Beloff founded the Styletex Company in 1920, and became one of Meriden's most enterprising merchants in the women's apparel business. His first store was at 19 Colony Street, in the store which had been vacated by Besse-Boynton. In 1941, he purchased the G.A.R. block on Colony Street, and remodeled it into a handsome store of the latest design, later adding the store just to the north of these premises. Mr. Beloff's sons, Arthur and Marvin, are active in the management of the business.

Hamrah's moved to their present location, 19 Colony Street, after occupying a store in the Cherniack Building, then the Hall & Lewis Building, for a number of years. The business, conducted by several members of the Hamrah family, handles household

linens, draperies, lingerie, imported novelties and many other lines. Charles Hamrah conducts an establishment at 75 South Colony Street devoted to rugs, other floor coverings, and rug renovation.

The Reed-Holroyd Company, 7 Colony Street, has a long history dating back to the time when Howard Bros. furniture store occupied the same location. This business was purchased early in the century by the Reed Housefurnishing Company which, in turn, was absorbed by the present company, which also operates stores in Wallingford and Middletown.

The Cherniack Company, another old firm, which began as a fur establishment 69 years ago, purchased the Hall & Lewis building in 1941 and remodeled it to provide quarters for its fur and fashion shop at 2 Colony Street, as well as for its fur-fashioning and fur-renovation business. The block is now known as the Cherniack Building.

The New York Dress Goods Store at 25 Colony Street is the outgrowth of the dry goods business founded in 1917 by the late Samuel Umansky. It was originally located at 42 West Main Street. The present store, with basement, was opened in 1919.

The Meriden Furniture Company, 55 Colony Street, was established in 1890 by F. J. O'Neil and C. E. Flynn as O'Neil & Flynn who, in addition to dealing in furniture, conducted an undertaking business. Fred J. Winder was later taken into the firm. Both of the original partners died, and Mr. Winder sold out his interest in the business, which is now conducted by Herman Gold.

The John F. Butler Company, now known as the Butler Paint Company, at 51 Colony Street, is an even older concern. It was established in 1876 under the name of Butler & Larkin. The original place of business was in the Hicks Building on Colony Street, next to the old Meriden House. Later, it was in the Wilcox Block. The present building was erected in 1894 by Mr. Butler in conjunction with O'Neil & Flynn. In 1907, William O. Butler, son of the founder, became connected with the business which he still operates.

The history of Emerson & Whitney, 43 Colony Street, began in 1884, when the New England Boot and Shoe House was founded by J. H. Warshauer. Since 1922, the business has been located in the Colony Building. It was one of the original tenants



when the building was erected in that year.

Jepson's Book Store, 31 Colony Street, was established in 1910 by Miss Louise J. Jepson. The first store was at Crown and East Main Street. In 1915 it moved to 4 Colony Street, in the Meriden House Block. For a time it was at 7 West Main Street, just around the corner. In 1922, another move took place, into the new Colony Building, which had just been completed. The most recent move, made several years ago, was to the present location.

Stockwell's, 36 Colony Street, is another old business. The Boston & Meriden Clothing Company was doing business at 34 and 36 Colony Street in 1906. In 1915, the business was conducted as the A. T. Gallup Company. By 1920, it had become Gallup, Stockwell & Co., and the present name was adopted when Harry Stockwell, long associated with the business, bought out the Gallup interests in 1935. George F. Lewis and Harold J. Wusterbarth took over the business after Mr. Stockwell's death, and Mr. Lewis in 1956 became the sole proprietor.

Michaels Jewelers is the successor to Michaels-Maurer, a firm which opened a store at 21 West Main Street in 1926. The business actually dates back to 1900, when A. Michaels began business in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The present large store is at 17 Colony Street.

Most of the stores on West Main Street are products of more recent times, although a few had their origins many years ago.

John F. Molloy, stationer, 20 West Main Street, is one of these. He began business in 1904 at 51½ West Main Street. From there, he moved to the Meriden House Block, then to the Byxbee Block, and from there to 8 West Main Street. As the business assumed larger proportions, especially in the distribution of newspapers and periodicals, he found further expansion necessary, and purchased the building in which the store is now housed, with loading facilities opening on Hanover Street. The building was remodeled, and an addition was constructed running through to the street in the rear. Stanley McGar, associated with Mr. Molloy, is part owner, and the structure is now known as the Molloy-McGar Building.

The Alling Rubber Company at 12 West Main Street was established here in 1912 next to the present location of the Reed-Holroyd Company on Colony Street. In 1919, it was moved to the present location.

The greatest change on West Main Street in recent history occurred in 1941, when seven blocks of property on the south side of the street, extending from the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company building to Katt Bros. store were sold to the Tishman interests of New York City and several large stores were constructed to take the place of the old stores which were razed. The only exception was the Sugarman Block, which had been opened in 1937. New companies were formed to hold the properties and erect and lease the new stores. Occupying the stores built at that time are Genung's, Inc., one of a series of stores operated in New York state and Connecticut by the same firm; the W. T. Grant Company, which moved from across the street to the largest of the new stores on the south side of the street; Nugent's Dress Shop, Berley's, and the Miles Shoes Company. The Genung store has nearly 30,000 square feet of floor space and the Grant store contains 32,000 square feet.

E. F. Powers Shoe Store was at 27 West Main Street at the time of the Centennial. Years later, it moved to 6 West Main Street. Manning & Conwell's Shoe Store, which had been located on Colony Street, took over the business at this location.

Church & Morse were at 8 West Main Street in 1906, remaining there until 1925, when their hardware business was removed to 25 South Colony Street, where the premises were completely remodeled, with two stores thrown into one. Church & Morse was established in 1872 under the firm name of Church & Sprague, and was reorganized under the present name in 1879.

The J. C. Penney Company, one of the large system of stores operated throughout the country under that name, has been established here since 1928 at 43-45 West Main Street.

The F. W. Woolworth Company, formerly on Colony Street, moved to 35 West Main Street, when the ground floor of the Derecktor Building at Colony and West Main Streets was completely remodeled. The block in which the store is located was purchased this year by Maurice Zuckerman, owner of the Woman's Shop in the same building. The changes in the Derecktor Building included a large store for the Liggett company, and a store with entrances on Colony Street and West Main Street for Kresge's.

The business of the J. Lacourciere Company at 55 Grove Street was founded in 1900. It is one of the oldest stores in the



city handling paints and artist's supplies.

Bullard, Fowler & LaPlace, Inc., 75-79 West Main Street, was established in 1926 by Irving M. Fowler, H. M. Bullard, and S. R. LaPlace of Deep River. All three of the founders have since died, but the furniture business has been continued.

Brown's Department Store, 54 West Main Street, was founded in 1932 by Aaron Brown, who began the business as the Meriden Bargain Store at 58 West Main Street. The store was later expanded to take in the stores at 54 and 56 West Main Street, and the present name was adopted.

The Growers Outlet at 82 West Main Street was started in 1934 in a building erected by the Griswold, Richmond & Glock Company, an old Meriden firm long since disbanded.

At 20 Pratt Street, the men's clothing business of Harry Israel, Inc., dates from the business established by the late Harry Israel in 1904 at 64½ East Main Street. Since his death, it has been conducted by his brother, William Israel. The present large store was opened in 1928, and has been remodeled several times since.

Also on Pratt Street is the firm of Oscar Gross & Sons, men's and boys' clothiers, at No. 28, a store which was originally known, when it was at 76 West Main Street 50 years ago, as Hyman & Gross. Since the death of Oscar Gross, the business has been conducted by his two sons, Samuel and Louis J. Gross. The store has been greatly enlarged under their management.

One of the oldest stores in the downtown section is Little, Somers & Hyatt at 77 East Main Street which was started in 1872 by Hubert Little as H. Little & Co. When J. E. Somers joined the firm, the name was changed to Little & Somers. The present name was adopted in 1883 when I. B. Hyatt bought an interest. Willard C. Hyatt is the active head of the concern, which specializes in paints, artists' materials and decorating.

Wusterbarth Bros., 82 East Main Street, was founded in 1900 on Miller Street, and was for many years at 45 Pratt Street until it removed to the present location in 1930. Originally dealing in sporting goods, it has specialized in toys in recent years.

Broderick & Curtin's Pharmacy, established 1886, was at its present location, 42 East Main Street at the time of the Centennial. It is now owned and operated by Thomas Joyce.

Charles J. Hayek's jewelry store, 17 East Main Street, is successor to the store once conducted by A. Langner at 20 West

Main Street, which later became Langner & Hayek, and remained under that name until Mr. Hayek took over the business, which is now operated by his son, Charles J. Hayek, Jr.

### UPTOWN SECTION

In the vicinity of Broad and East Main Streets, the original shopping district, are stores with histories running far back into the past. The J. F. Raven Hardware Company, 294 East Main Street, had its origin when Eli C. Birdsey engaged in the hardware business in 1854 in the same location. Upon Mr. Birdsey's retirement in 1917, the present company was formed, with J. F. Raven, Carl E. Raven and Guy Dutton in the active management. Carl E. Raven today is the head of the business.

Fred L. Yale started in the grocery business in 1878 in the Coe Block next to the Center Congregational Church, a building torn down before the beginning of this century. The business was later moved to the Barnes Block on East Main Street, and finally to the present location, 298 East Main Street. Elwood Yale succeeded his father as the head of the concern, and his two sons, Frederick E. Yale and Oliver M. Yale, have long been associated with him in the business.

The Lynch Drug Company, 298 East Main Street, was founded in 1868 by E. Lyman Marvin, and was the third drug store to be established in the city. In 1870, Mr. Marvin bought out the store of Davis & Greenfield at the present location. He was succeeded by his stepson, Willis N. Barber in 1891, who conducted the business until 1919, when his interest was purchased by Raymond M. Lynch, who took his brother William into partnership. The business changed hands in 1952, when the Lynch brothers sold out their interests to Walter J. Kopcza, Frank V. Chester, and Bernadine S. Potrepka of Southington.

Anthony Mercaldi's shoe repair shop at 302 East Main Street, known as the American Shoe Repairing Company, has been in business for more than half a century. Anthony P. Mercaldi, Jr. is associated with his father in the business.

### CONSTRUCTION FIRMS

Meriden has a number of long established construction firms which have acquired far more than a local reputation. They do a large volume of business annually in many states.



The Lane Construction Corp., 965 East Main Street, occupies the large administration building erected for it in 1951 near the Wilbur Cross Parkway. The business was started in 1890 by John S. Lane, then of Hartford, who erected a stone-crushing plant on land leased from Bartholomew & Coe. Mr. Lane's first road work was in Windsor Locks that same year, and, from this start grew the present large business, which executes contracts throughout New England, New York, and in Pennsylvania. The Lane Construction Corp. was organized in 1902 to take over the road building department. The company has built hundreds of miles of excellent roads, including the new type of super-highways, airports and other work of a similar nature. Arthur F. Eggleston is president of the firm, and also of John S. Lane & Son, Inc., which includes the quarry interests.

The H. Wales Lines Company, builder and distributor of building materials, with offices and yards at 134 State Street, is successor to George Bassett, who began business in 1843. He sold out to Perkins & Lines in 1864. From this small beginning grew the extensive business which has erected thousands of buildings in towns and cities scattered through several states. The late H. Wales Lines, who joined the business as a young man with experience in bricklaying, had a large part in the growth of Meriden. The business became H. Wales Lines & Co. in 1878, and the present company was formed ten years later. Nearly every important building in Meriden erected during the nineteenth century, and many in this century, were built by this firm. The present City Hall was one of its contracts. Charles S. Phelps, long associated with Mr. Lines, is chairman of the board, and Carl R. Langer is president.

The L. Suzio Construction Company, another large contracting firm, was founded by the late Leonardo Suzio in 1896. Many large highway contracts in Connecticut are the work of the Suzio organization. The L. Suzio Concrete Company, an affiliated concern, supplies ready-mixed concrete, and has a plant on Westfield Road. Henry D. Altobello is president and treasurer of both companies.

Another old contracting firm is the James T. Kay Company, 127 State Street, which specializes in plumbing and heating. It was founded in 1872 by the late James T. Kay, and has been conducted for many years by his son, Frank E. Kay.

The G. R. Cummings Roofing Company, 198-210 State Street, has carried out important contracts in many states. The business was established in 1899 by the late G. R. Cummings, and the present company was incorporated in 1921. It has one of the most modern and complete plants of the kind in the country. George R. Cummings, son of the founders, is president and treasurer.

C. N. Flagg & Co., Inc. was organized in 1910 to do steam-fitting and plumbing contracting for larger buildings. Plant modernization became a specialty, together with wholesale piping and supplies. The firm has handled large contracts in many states. Its warehouses are at the corner of Griswold and Cambridge Streets, and the general offices were moved recently to Elm Street. Since the death of Charles N. Flagg, the founder, Peter Flagg, his son, has been the executive head of the concern.

#### BUILDING SUPPLIES

In the field of building supplies, the Lyon & Billard Company, founded in 1847, is the oldest concern. It was established by John D. Billard and George W. Lyon at 13 South Colony Street. In 1873, John L. Billard, son of John D., was admitted to partnership. The business was incorporated in 1878. John L. Billard became president in 1902. He retired in 1923, when he was succeeded by A. J. White as president.

The Meriden Lumber Company at 174 State Street was started in 1859 by Lyman & Clarke. The firm later became Clarke & Converse and, still later, Converse and Seymore. The business was incorporated in 1890 under its present name. W. F. Terrell, the present general manager and treasurer, became associated with the company in 1922. Charles H. Cuno is president, and Herbert J. Reeves vice president and secretary. After a fire, which wiped out most of the yard two years ago, it has been completely rebuilt.



# Parks and Playgrounds

THE HANGING HILLS overlooking the city and visible in almost every part of it are a constant reminder that Meriden possesses one of the most beautiful recreation areas in the entire country. These hills, known as East Peak and West Peak, are located on the western boundary of Hubbard Park, comprising approximately 1,200 acres of carefully kept woodland, lake, and stream, with playgrounds, tennis courts, swimming and wading pools, flower gardens, and picnic spots among their attractions. An extensive state park runs along the western ridge of mountains adjoining the land owned by Meriden.

Hubbard Park does not stand alone. Spotted throughout the city are other conveniently located parks and playgrounds, each serving principally for a particular section, but open to all residents, young and old.

In 1899, by an amendment of the city charter, the first park commission was created and placed in charge of all the parks. The playgrounds, as they developed, were administered separately under a recreation commission until the two boards were combined February 3, 1950 as the Meriden Park and Recreation Commission with four members. A full-time park superintendent and a director of recreation work together in supervising the care and maintenance of the parks and playgrounds, and guiding the activities of the planned program. During the summer months, the playgrounds are staffed by well qualified leaders and assistants. Lifeguards are stationed wherever there is public bathing, and free instruction in swimming is furnished to children and adults.

### HUBBARD PARK

Most of the land in Hubbard Park was presented to the city by the late Walter Hubbard, who was president of the Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Company, later absorbed by the Charles Parker Company. He gave it outright, with no strings attached, except that everything connected with the park was to remain free for the people of Meriden, and that no concessions for profit were

ever to be allowed within the park area. In spite of sporadic efforts to obtain permission for refreshment stands on a commercial basis, the wishes of the donor have never been violated. This complete freedom from all types of commercialism is one of the principal charms of the park for nature lovers.

Mr. Hubbard created a trust fund of \$50,000, the interest on which was made available toward the upkeep of the park. Clarence P. Bradley, the son of his business partner, Nathaniel Bradley, set up a trust fund of equal amount in the terms of his will. Today, the sum realized from these two funds annually defrays only a small part of the expense of maintaining the park, due to the extensive improvements which have been made and the increasing cost of caring for the facilities.

But the donor spent largely during his lifetime to develop the park according to his ideas. The outlay from his own resources amounted to between \$400,000 and \$500,000. Beginning in 1897, he cleared the land in the lower park, built numerous roads and trails and constructed Mirror Lake. The tower on East Peak, known as Castle Craig was another of his projects. It was patterned after the towers built by the Turks along the Danube River in the 12th century.

These jutting, precipitous formations which overhang the pleasant valley of Meriden date from the glacial age, and are of especial interest to geologists. But East and West Peaks, for the average resident, have interests far separated from scientific research.

West Peak was once the site of a number of summer homes. The first to build on the top of the mountain was W. H. Catlin, whose cottage was occupied for a number of years by Police Sergeant Herman Schuerer. Wilbur H. Squire built a spacious home later used by the Y.W.C.A. during the summer. The site was sold in 1939. Cornelius J. Danaher, Sr. erected a summer residence on the mountain, which he and his family used for 35 years. Mr. Danaher also acquired about 40 acres of land near the summit, and 60 acres in addition on the plateau below the peak. Others who owned cottages on the mountain were Fred Hotchkiss and Thomas H. Burkinshaw. Some who had bought land did not build. Nearly all traces of the little colony have disappeared.

Mr. Danaher once proposed the construction of an electric railway to the top of the mountain, but the proposal was defeated



in a city referendum, mainly on the ground that the water in the reservoirs at the base might become contaminated.

There are now three radio stations on West Peak. The first constructed is owned by Station WDRC of Hartford, one of the first stations in the country to send out frequency modulation broadcasts. It is located on land purchased from Mr. Danaher.

Station WMMW owns a station on the peak, which also does FM broadcasting. It was built on land obtained from the late Levon Kassabian. Station WATR-TV of Waterbury also owns and operates a station on the peak. The Kassabian family still has a cottage on the mountain, the only one remaining of the numerous residences which were built for use there in the summer.

Mr. Danaher has disposed of all his mountain holdings. He sold about 100 acres of land to the State of Connecticut as a State Park which remains as a reservation under state control.

For a number of years, the state has maintained an observation tower there, used for spotting forest fires. It is manned during the seasons where the danger of fire in the woodlands is considered most serious.

A beautiful winding road leads to the summit of East Peak, where the land in the vicinity of the tower has been leveled and turned into a hard-surfaced parking area for the automobiles of sightseers. Fireplaces for picnickers are close at hand. But many come just for the view, which comprises the wide range of territory from Mount Tom in Massachusetts to Long Island on the south. Long Island Sound is visible on a clear day from the top of the tower, which is reached by a flight of iron steps. The city spreads out from the lower fringes of the park, with part of the reservoir system in the foreground, and the high land on the eastern edge of Meriden at the extreme range of vision in that direction. The edges of this vantage point are protected by a stone balustrade and railing.

There are several alternate routes up the mountainside. The more rugged of these are fit only for the hardiest of hikers, but there are easier paths for those with less climbing ability. One route is by way of the Fairview drive at the south end of Merimere Reservoir to the rest house half-way up the mountain, and from there up a steeper trail to the summit.

For many years, motor vehicles were forbidden in the park,

but those were horse-and-buggy times, when a leisurely drive in the family carriage was a favorite form of recreation. Large numbers of automobiles now pass through the park or halt by the roadside, and the parking area near Mirror Lake is always crowded with cars on week ends, winter and summer.

The lake itself is a focal point for all-season activities. Swimming is not permitted there, and has not been allowed for many years, although at one time the lake shore was a public bathing beach. Fishing is also forbidden, except once a year in the spring, when the "fishing derby" is held for boys and girls, with a long list of prizes for different age groups. Hundreds of children take part in this event annually.

In the spring, the whole lower park is a mass of bloom with thousands upon thousands of daffodils of many varieties. They spread out among the trees bordering the lake and approach the edges of the roadway, forming a sight which draws crowds of visitors, some of whom come for long distances to enjoy this lovely display.

But this is only the season's opener. As it advances, the scene changes as more and more varieties of flowers burst into bloom under the skillful nursing of the park crews supervised by Mr. Barry. Some of the beds which have been developed show elaborate arrangements of plants and flowers developed by the expert gardeners.

In the fall, a magnificent display of chrysanthemums, grown in the park greenhouses, is another attraction. Plant culture in the park began in 1948 when the greenhouse was built by park employees.

Well-kept tennis courts are a feature of the park. They are open to all local tennis players during the season, but reservations must be fitted into a tight schedule due to the large number desiring to play.

One of the most widely used facilities ever installed in the park is the Lions Club swimming pool, dedicated July 8, 1951. The Meriden Lions Club initiated this project and raised the funds to make it possible. Its members not only contributed liberally themselves, but conducted a campaign soliciting the support of the entire community. The money thus raised went far toward the construction of the pool, and the city cooperated to complete the project, which is maintained at city expense. Many types of



pools were examined before the plan reached final form. The pool as built has proved most satisfactory. It contains 200,000 gallons. During the season, the water is continuously purified. Thousands enjoy the facilities during the summer. Swimming classes and water events are held there. The pool is under constant supervision by qualified attendants employed by the city when it is in use.

So great was the success of the swimming pool in the park that the Lions Club has been besieged with requests from parents on the east side to undertake the construction of a pool in that part of the city. On March 2 of this year, the Meriden Lions Welfare Project, Inc. announced that it would build the "Wishing Pool" for east side children, using the same plans that have proved so satisfactory in Hubbard Park.

The Lions Club also sponsored and raised funds for the construction of a wading pool in the park for younger children, replacing the old wading pool which had become obsolete. It was opened in 1954.

Camp Hubbard, a day camp for Meriden children, is maintained in the park during the summer by the Recreation Department. The Junior Chamber of Commerce constructed a shelter there in 1953. Buses carry the children to the park daily during the camping season, where they enjoy supervised play, and learn woodcraft and handicraft from the camp's staff of instructors and attendants.

Band concerts in the park have become increasingly popular in recent years. A rustic band shell, placed at the foot of the natural amphitheater which slopes gradually down the crest of the hill overlooking the busiest portion of the park's activities, is an ideal spot for such concerts. A rustic bandstand at the foot of the hill has proved inadequate for the use of the Meriden City Band, made up of members of the local union of musicians, who have given these concerts free of charge for years, with the help of an appropriation from their national headquarters. In 1954, a campaign was started to raise funds for a music shell. With the help of the city, the new shell was constructed for the Sesquicentennial.

One interesting feature of the park is a large slab bearing dinosaur footprints which are a reminder of the antediluvian monsters who once roamed this vicinity.

Under rules adopted in 1953, Hubbard Park is closed from

10 p.m. to 6 a.m. No commercial vehicles are allowed at any time. The speed limit within the park is 15 miles per hour.

In winter, when the ice is pronounced safe, Mirror Lake is an ideal place for skating. The park crews clear the ice as soon as possible after every snowstorm. Lights are strung up for night skating, and the surface is thronged whenever conditions are favorable. A pavilion beside the lake furnishes shelter and a place where skates may be put on in comfort.

Nearby is a playground, with swings and other equipment. Tables and chairs are placed at various vantage spots. On the western shore of the lake is an area much favored by picnickers. Near this area are the shelters for the flock of mallard ducks which lives in the park, under the protection and care of James Barry, park superintendent, and his helpers. The ducks show few signs of wildness in the carefully guarded life to which they have become accustomed.

### CITY PARK

City Park is the oldest park in the city. It has been in existence since 1880, and was formerly much more largely used than at present, especially in the years when public band concerts were presented there from a bandstand built for that purpose.

Bounded by Bunker Avenue, Franklin Street, Park Avenue and Warren Street, City Park is mainly a haven for residents of the vicinity. There are nine acres within these boundaries. Some of the park's large trees fell victims to the hurricanes of 1938 and 1944, but enough of them remain to provide delightful shade in summer. The lawns are a playground for the numerous children of the neighborhood.

During World War II, after a long attempt to find a suitable location for quonset huts to be set up as accommodations for the overflow of war workers, it was decided to place some of them in City Park. After the war, when the housing situation was somewhat relieved, the huts were removed.

### BROOKSIDE PARK

Brookside Park, like Hubbard Park, is a monument to the generosity of Walter Hubbard, who purchased the land in 1901 and turned it over to the city for park purposes. It contains 13 acres and extends from Camp to Broad Street on both sides of Harbor



Brook, a distance of nearly three quarters of a mile. The brook flows through the entire park, and is kept in its channel by retaining walls for part of the distance. At one point, near the lower end, a bathing pool furnishes fun for children in summer. A bathhouse stands beside the pool. A wading pool and some playground equipment add to the pleasures of the park for younger children.

#### BALDWIN'S BEACH

Before the Lions Pool in Hubbard Park was constructed, Baldwin's Pond had practically a local monopoly as a place for public swimming and bathing. Near the end of North Wall Street, it may also be reached from the prolongation of Britannia Street into Westfield Road. The city maintains a sandy beach beside the pond. Bathhouses are provided, and there is also a refreshment stand. Within easy swimming distance from shore, there is a float equipped with a diving tower. Swimming is under careful supervision by a staff employed by the Recreation Department. The pond is drained every season, and the water is tested frequently, as a sanitary precaution, after it has been refilled.

#### OTHER RECREATION AREAS

A beach at Beaver Pond is leased by the city to provide additional bathing facilities during the summer months.

Dossin Park, below Hanover Pond, at the intersection of Coe Avenue and the road to Cheshire, was named for the late Oscar Dossin, who served Meriden for many years as a recreation commissioner. A beach and bathhouse were constructed there for the use of the public, but tests revealed that the water was impure, and swimming was forbidden. The old Red Bridge, just below this point, is a spot where many residents of the older generations swam as boys, long before tests of the water at public bathing places became mandatory.

#### ATHLETIC FIELDS

The city has seven athletic fields: Columbus Park, on Lewis Avenue, 10½ acres; Washington Park, 11 acres; Ceppa Field, 4½ acres; North End Field, 1½ acres; South Meriden Field, 7 acres; Bronson Avenue Field, 2¾ acres; Legion Field, 4 acres (leased by the city for a 10-year period). Some of these fields have been

extensively developed. Washington Park has tennis courts and a field house, where a caretaker resides. Kindergarten classes are conducted there. Ceppa Field, named for the late Monsignor Ceppa of St. Stanislaus Church, which formerly owned the property, is equipped with lights for night baseball and football. The lights, gift of the International Silver Company, were formerly installed at Insilco Field.

Twenty-three persons under the supervision of Bernard Sprafke, director, compose the personnel for the eight-week playground period. Only two school playgrounds are used in connection with this program: the Hanover School in South Meriden and the Benjamin Franklin School on the west side.

Park Department employees are Irving Danielson, assistant to James Barry, park superintendent; William Remy, caretaker at City and Brookside Parks, who is assisted by Joseph Carabetta; John Erickson, Guido Bertagna, Fred Rudolph and Durwood Tompkins. Four of the men are stationed at Hubbard Park, but are moved to other areas as work is required. Lawrence Fraser is caretaker of Washington Park and John Borek is caretaker of Ceppa Field. During the summer, the following are engaged to take care of the extra work load: Fred Schlette, Legion Park; Michael Amoroso, Columbus Park; John Patrucco, Little League Field (on Britannia Street); Edward Everard, Bronson Avenue Field.

A new field in South Meriden will be opened for the first time in the summer of 1956. It is on Meadow Street and borders on Hanover Pond. The area has been graded and seeded during the last two years. A backstop will be set up there, and a diamond will be constructed for baseball games.



### The Meriden Post Office

MERIDEN POST OFFICE, which now has receipts totaling one million dollars a year, from five different stations, began in 1806 when President Thomas Jefferson appointed Amos White as the first postmaster. The postal service was established in the city the same year it separated from Wallingford, in a building owned by Patrick Lewis at Broad and East Main Street.

The present Federal Building at 87 Colony Street was built in 1902 at a cost of more than \$100,000. There is a classified post office, "Station A", at 231 East Main Street, and three contract stations: No. 1 at 445 Colony Street, No. 5 at 120 Springdale Avenue, and the South Meriden Station at 1 Main Street.

A parcel post annex and garage at 141 Grove Street was opened in February 1955 for all parcels and the 14 government trucks. An addition to the Federal Building was completed in 1934.

Joseph R. Ferrigno has been postmaster since March 17, 1955. He was acting postmaster from August 1, 1953 to 1955. Assistant postmaster is Maurice J. Looby, and superintendent of mails is John E. Doherty.

The first postmaster, Amos White, was succeeded after several years by Patrick Lewis, owner of the post office building, who served until 1812. President Andrew Jackson appointed Levi Yale who was postmaster for 12 years. The post office moved in 1828 to what is now 641 Broad Street, near Dayton Place.

President William Henry Harrison appointed Richard Dowd who died after serving six months as postmaster. He was succeeded by Walter Booth who served three years under President John Tyler.

In 1844 the businessmen of "West Meriden" agitated for their own post office. This was established in 1845 on the Guy property on West Main Street, with Joel H. Guy as postmaster until 1849.

Ira N. Yale was named "East Side" postmaster in 1845 by President James K. Polk in 1845 but died after three years and was succeeded by Almerson Ives. President Zachary Taylor appointed Hiram Hall who moved the operation to a brick

building just for post office purposes. President Millard Fillmore appointed Asha H. Curtiss and in 1853 Hiram Hall was appointed for the second time and died in office.

President Franklin Pierce appointed Bertrand Yale, who served seven years until President Abraham Lincoln reappointed Asha H. Curtiss. The post office was moved to the Franklin Hall Building, near the Congregational Church on Broad Street. In 1865, Linus Birdsey, appointed by President Andrew Johnson, transferred the post office back to its old site.

Meanwhile, Noah A. Linsley was appointed West Meriden postmaster by President Pierce, and moved the post office to 21 West Main Street on the property of the F. J. Wheeler Company. When Joel Guy returned as postmaster in 1853, he moved it again to the south side of West Main Street, and later to the present site of the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company, 14 West Main Street. Samuel B. Morgan served from 1858 to 1861, then George W. Rogers was appointed by President Lincoln. Postmaster Rogers moved to a brick structure at the corner of Colony and West Main Street, but the building was later destroyed by fire.

A room was taken at 13 Colony Street, and in 1865 Wallis Bull was appointed postmaster. The following year, the operation was moved again to 37 Colony Street, in the north room of the old Byxbee Block.

The East Side post office was transferred after the Civil War to John Ives' brick house at 489 Broad Street. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Lon Hall, who served for eight years, 1869 to 1877. His brother, William F. Hall, was appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes, and in 1880 the post office was moved to 320 East Main Street, now known as "Station A."

The name "Meriden Post Office," the then official designation of the East Side or uptown post office, was moved to the West Side post office. The West Side post office had moved in 1877 to the Hill Building on Winthrop Square after the appointment of Erwin D. Hall by President Hayes. In 1880 the post office was in the Wilcox Block.

The next postmasters were William H. Miller, 1886-1890; Henry Dryhurst, 1890-94; and 1898-1914; John J. Anderson, 1894-98; John F. Penders, 1914-23; James J. Fitzpatrick, 1923-36; and John J. Scanlon, 1936-53.



## THE MERIDEN POST OFFICE

Receipts in 1906, the Centennial year, were \$75,000, with 20 carriers and 18 clerks. In 1951 delivery service was extended to South Meriden.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

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### Public Institutions

#### THE MERIDEN HOSPITAL

THE COMPLETELY modernized Meriden Hospital of today is the result of a program which started in 1942 and culminated when the new addition was opened in 1952. Actually, the improvements did not cease at that point, but have been almost continuous since, and new goals appear at intervals above the horizon to keep pace with the needs of the area served. Since 1942, capital expenditures total approximately \$2,400,000.

The new building raised the capacity of the hospital to 220 beds and 48 bassinets, or more than double its previous capacity. After it had been placed in service, in March 1952, the old building at the rear was completely remodeled and re-equipped to match the new facilities, providing a hospital plant which compares favorably with any hospital of its size.

Although the first movement toward expansion began in 1942, it was impossible to begin construction during the war period, even after plans had been accepted and the necessary funds had been raised. There were further impediments in the period immediately after the war, principally the shortage of structural iron, steel, and other building materials. The first step was to build a new laundry and power house with surplus capacity looking far into the future. Then came the major structure, which had been planned with infinite care, and in consideration of the standards relating to the number of beds per thousand of population as set up by the U. S. Department of Public Health to provide for the areas of Meriden and Wallingford. During several periods since it was placed in use, the hospital has operated at full capacity.

The history of the Meriden Hospital dates back to 1874 when Dr. James L. Terry, working in conjunction with Dr. E. T. Bradstreet, enlisted the aid of Mrs. Abiram Chamberlain in raising money for the establishment of the institution. As the result of a meeting in the Town Hall, attended by many physicians, and



presided over by Mayor E. J. Doolittle, the mayor was authorized to seek a charter from the state legislature. The charter was granted by the General Assembly in January 1885.

The next important step was taken in December of the same year, when a meeting was held at which Horace C. Wilcox, Seth J. Hall, Charles Parker, Walter Hubbard, Nathaniel L. Bradley, E. J. Doolittle, the Rev. J. H. Chapin, Levi E. Coe, and George R. Curtis were elected directors of the newly formed corporation.

Six years were spent in settling upon a suitable site. The first location chosen was the Camp property, an octagonally shaped house on Franklin Street. But negotiations to purchase it were unsuccessful. Meanwhile, 18 physicians, irked by the delay, signed a petition urging the construction of an entirely new building.

In 1892, after long deliberations, the directors authorized the purchase of the Jared R. Cook home on Cook Avenue, a mansard-roofed house built about 1872. The hospital continued to use this structure until it was torn down in 1923 to make room for new construction at that time. The house was extensively remodeled for hospital purposes, and various civic organizations participated in furnishing it, including the City Mission Society, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and societies of the First Congregational Church. Dedication took place December 21, 1892.

The Women's Auxiliary, with an executive committee of 15 members, had an important part in the operation of the hospital. The membership of the committee was eventually increased to 40, and it continued to supervise the management of the hospital until 1920, when the institution had grown so large that the by-laws were changed to create an executive board of five members of the board of directors to take charge.

The first medical staff was appointed with the aid of the Meriden Medical Society in March 1894. Among the well-known attending physicians and surgeons were Doctors E. T. Bradstreet, H. W. Delesdernier, J. D. Eggleston, N. Nickerson, S. Otis, A. W. Tracy, A. H. Fenn, F. P. Griswold, O. J. D. Hughes, H. A. Meeks, A. Ploetz, E. W. Smith, J. L. Gartland, E. W. Pierce, E. A. Wilson, F. H. Monroe, G. A. Peck, and William Galvin, together with a consulting staff of Doctors G. H. Wilson, C. H. S. Davis, John Tait, and E. C. Newport.

The first matron was Mrs. Alice Baumann, who was succeeded

in 1896 by Miss Bessie Livingston Webb. At that time, the medical staff was given full control over all nurses.

An addition to the hospital was completed in 1905, providing an operating room, two wards, four private rooms, a diet kitchen, a large basement, and living quarters on the top floor for the staff. Again, many civic organizations assisted by providing equipment and furnishings.

In 1910, N. L. Bradley, then president of the board of directors, and Mrs. Bradley purchased a house at 171 Cook Avenue and donated it to the hospital, completely furnished, to provide quarters for the nurses of the institution. Clarence P. Bradley, their son, donated \$5,000 in 1915 for an addition to the nurses' home.

The first X-ray equipment was installed in 1913 under the direction of Dr. L. F. Wheatley.

In 1918, Miss Bessie Etter was appointed to the newly created position of superintendent of the Nurses' Training School. The need for additional nursing accommodations was met in 1920, when a house next to the nurses' home was purchased, remodeled, and opened as a dormitory. Two more homes, at 12 and 16 King Street, were purchased the same year.

By 1920, the need for enlarging the hospital had become urgent, and a campaign to raise \$300,000 for this purpose was begun. The goal was oversubscribed by more than \$300,000. A Wallingford man, Edwin H. Brown, was made an incorporator in recognition of Wallingford's contribution, and Wallingford has had a voice in the hospital's direction since that time.

The new building was completed and occupied in 1924.

By 1929, the hospital had again outgrown its accommodations for nurses. Clarence P. Bradley saved the situation with a gift of \$150,000 for a new nurses' home which was constructed in 1929 and named after the donor who had made it possible.

The tremendous growth of the Meriden Hospital was reflected in its financial statement for the last fiscal year, ending September 30, 1955, which showed a net operating revenue of \$1,388,727.98. Operating expenses were \$1,429,441.50. The operating loss of \$40,713.52 was offset by other income of \$72,233.24, including state and municipal grants, the Community Fund, endowment funds, and miscellaneous. The hospital has nearly 400 full and



part-time employees, exclusive of students in the Nurses' Training School.

Warren L. Mottram, a Wallingford man, is president of the Meriden Hospital. The medical board is headed by Dr. Michael J. Conroy. Dr. David J. Cohen is director of medicine; Dr. Francis Giuffrida, director of surgery; Dr. Hoyt C. Taylor, director of obstetrics and gynecology. Dr. Richard Breck and Dr. Donald Badner are members at large. Howard F. Saviteer has been business administrator since 1945.

Practically all of the physicians in Meriden and many in Wallingford have staff appointments, and use the hospital's facilities.

### WORLD WAR II VETERANS' MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Even before World War II had ended, the question of a suitable memorial to those who had given their lives had been raised here, and discussion developed on all sides.

Mayor Francis R. Danaher took the first step toward the solution of the many problems in connection with this subject when he appointed on March 13, 1946 a committee to recommend what he called a "living memorial." William H. Rybeck, a lieutenant colonel in the U. S. Army during the second World War was named to head this committee, which consisted of representatives of 12 veterans' organizations and a 47-man citizens' group. A poll of this committee endorsed the "living memorial" idea, but there were many proposals as to the form which it should take.

In July 1946, it was decided to take a poll of the public to obtain guidance. A planning and survey committee, a finance committee, and a publicity committee were also set up.

Of all the proposals which had been submitted, the proposal to erect a Memorial Hospital gained the strongest support.

After months of exhaustive study, the committee voted 42 to 6 in favor of a Memorial Hospital. Incorporated in the plan proposed was a Memorial Chapel, in which would be placed, eventually, photographs of the 147 Meriden men who lost their lives in the conflict; the photos to be as nearly alike in format as possible.

The original plan was to build a small 100-bed hospital, but the plan was revised, reducing the number of beds to 50, with the idea that the grounds selected as a site should be large enough to permit expansion.

The United Veterans' Council and the allied group of citizens which had been incorporated in December 1951 as the Memorial Hospital Association proceeded carefully, guided by advice from many sources. A site was chosen on Paddock Avenue, which was purchased by the association and donated to the City of Meriden. Douglas Orr, well-known architect, a native of Meriden, drew the plans. A campaign for pledges was started, and approximately a quarter of the city's population agreed to contribute.

Through the association, a bill was presented to the state legislature, authorizing the City of Meriden to build and operate the hospital, and to appropriate \$600,000 for that purpose, the money to be provided through a bond issue. This special act was passed May 15, 1951, subject to approval in a city-wide referendum. The voters of Meriden endorsed the project in the referendum of June 26, 1951. Ground for the hospital was broken in November 1952.

Movable equipment to the value of \$74,000 was to be supplied by the association. An amendment to the original act later authorized the purchase of movable equipment from the balance of the \$600,000 avails of the bond issue after payment for the hospital's construction.

The system set up for the hospital's government was that it be managed by a board of trustees appointed by the Court of Common Council. The five-member board was to serve for five years, and the terms of members were staggered to create a vacancy for a new chairman each year. The board was to serve as a building committee during construction, with the help of the city engineer, the building inspector, and two members of the council, one from each major political party.

An advisory committee of not more than 30 was a feature of the act's provisions, but, after its appointment, members complained that it was not called into consultation by the trustees for many months.

Recently, as a result of these complaints, the advisory committee was activated, and provided with a constitution and by-laws as a separate body. It has the power to advise without being summoned, and to submit to the council, at the close of each calendar year, a report explaining its activities and the advice offered. The term of each member of this board was set at three years, with the terms of 10 members expiring each year,



to be replaced by 10 others.

The equipment fund has been swelled by the proceeds of minstrel shows and other events. The Association on June 26, 1951 organized the Ladies Auxiliary, which was later incorporated as the official Memorial Hospital Auxiliary. Members of the Auxiliary have made large contributions through the proceeds of card parties and entertainments held under their auspices.

More than 2,000 patients at the time of this writing had received treatment at the Memorial Hospital, since it was dedicated July 18, 1954, and many paid tributes to the quality of surgical, medical, and nursing care rendered by it. Dr. David P. Smith, first president of the Memorial Hospital Association, is chief of staff.

The Memorial Chapel idea was carried out as planned, and the photographs of the Meriden men who died in World War II confront all those who enter the hospital. As a "living memorial" the hospital is representative of the spirit of the community which it serves.

### THE BRADLEY HOME

The Bradley Home for the Aged, 320 Colony Street, was made possible through a bequest in the will of the late Clarence P. Bradley, who died in 1935. He left his entire property on Colony Street, where his own residence was located, as a site for the home, and set up funds for its establishment and maintenance. In his will, he expressed the wish that the dwelling be revamped as a permanent home for "aged and indigent men and women inhabitants of this state, preferably those belonging to Meriden."

The home was chartered by the state in March 1936, and was opened for residents the following month. The board of trustees later acquired land for a new quadrangle by purchasing for \$425,000 the Wilcox property just to the north. On it stood the home built by Horace C. Wilcox and occupied for years by his grandson, Roy C. Wilcox.

New buildings were erected to house 80 residents. The cost was defrayed entirely from the funds of the Bradley estate.

Acceptance of applicants is based on need, and also on the ability of the individual to adjust to the living conditions at the home, which have been made as pleasant as possible, with a minimum of regulations.

The home itself, and the grounds which surround it, are exceptionally beautiful.

Howard E. Houston, later elected mayor, came from the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor to become the first superintendent of the Bradley Home.

During Mr. Houston's military service in World War II, Mrs. Wilma M. Frost was placed in charge until his return. Mr. Houston returned to the position after his discharge from the service, and continued to function during his terms as mayor. Gov. John D. Lodge appointed him State Welfare Commissioner, but in December 1955 he resigned the commissionership and the superintendency of the Bradley Home to take an appointment as deputy director of the U. S. Foreign Operations Administration mission to India.

The present director of the Bradley Home is Dr. Cole B. Gibson, who took the position after his retirement as superintendent of Undercliff Sanatorium.

#### UNDERCLIFF HOSPITAL

Undercliff Hospital, until recently known as Undercliff Sanatorium, is a state institution, nestled protectively under the "hanging hills." The movement which led to its creation began here in 1907, instituted by members of the Central Labor Union, who were concerned about the increasing number of cases of tuberculosis among factory workers. A campaign to raise funds for a sanatorium was started. A tag day and three-day carnival in City Park in 1909 brought in some of the money needed — enough to make a start. The old almshouse off Capitol Avenue was used at first. In 1910, the institution was turned over to the jurisdiction of the State of Connecticut.

For the next ten years, Undercliff cared mainly for tubercular children, with advanced methods of treatment which won national recognition. Meanwhile, new buildings were constructed, and the institution was expanded in many ways. An infirmary was built in 1930. During the period of WPA projects, further additions were made, including a new administration building, hospital, school building, and nurses' quarters. The capacity of Undercliff was raised considerably at that time. Again the institution was caring mainly for adult patients.

From 1917 to 1954, Dr. Cole B. Gibson was superintendent





Meriden Y.M.C.A.



Meriden Y.W.C.A.





World War II Veterans' Memorial Hospital





The Meriden Hospital





Meriden Boys' Club  
(Under construction in 1956)



Meriden Girls' Club  
(The former O. H. Platt residence. Addition projected.)





Administration Building, Undercliff Hospital



American Legion Home, Legion Park, South Meriden





Municipal Parking Yard, Church Street



Pratt Street, from East Main Street





West Main Street



Colony Street at the Christmas Season





President Harry S. Truman speaks in Crown Street Square — 1952



The Record-Journal Plant



and medical director. Under his administration, Undercliff grew from a small cluster of wooden buildings to its present large proportions. Pioneer studies in the causes and treatment of tuberculosis were made during these years.

In 1954, a new chapter in Undercliff history began. The institution became the Undercliff Hospital unit of the Commission on the Care and Treatment of the Chronically Ill, Aged and Infirm. Dr. Paul Mason de la Vergne, who had been associated with Dr. Gibson for many years, was appointed as the new superintendent to succeed him upon his retirement.

Approximately 200 patients are currently receiving the benefits of the institution.

### CONNECTICUT SCHOOL FOR BOYS

The Connecticut School for Boys is today an example of the many changes in theory and practice in the treatment of juvenile delinquency. The methods which prevailed when it was founded more than 100 years ago have completely disappeared.

The school was started in 1850 at a time when there were only three or four similar institutions in the entire country. The General Assembly in 1851 provided \$10,000 for the purchase of a site in Meriden. The land on Colony Street just south of the present Bradley Home property, was purchased, and the first building was erected. Many local citizens contributed.

The first boys were admitted in 1854. They were housed in five cottages, each holding 50 boys. George E. Howe was the first director. The boys were kept under rigid supervision and treated as prisoners, with harsh discipline administered for infractions of the rules.

Manual training was introduced in 1900, when Charles Merriam Williams, a superintendent with more liberal theories, was at the head of the school. The boys wore gray pantaloons and blue jackets turned out in the school's workshops.

In 1921, the legislature appropriated \$530,000 for improvements at the school. This was the beginning of a new system of housing in cottages with a more homelike atmosphere than that provided previously.

However, charges of cruelty and incompetence were leveled against the school in 1930, while Edward Boyd was director. After his forced resignation, Roy L. McLaughlin, the present

director was appointed to the position, and a new regime began.

One of the first changes under Mr. McLaughlin was in the form of clothing worn by the boys. No longer were they forced to wear a garb which made them conspicuous.

The extensive building program instituted a little later provided the school with an entirely new campus, which was attractively landscaped.

New educational courses were instituted. Academic and vocational training were combined to prepare the boys to become self-supporting and good citizens after leaving the school. Creative expression was encouraged. The print shop began to publish a school paper, the *Hilltop Hubbub*, which has been continued.

Today, the methods employed at the Connecticut School for Boys have made it a model widely imitated throughout the country. And most of its graduates have made good use of their training to build successful, law-abiding careers.

#### CURTIS MEMORIAL LIBRARY

As early as 1796, Meriden had a small subscription library with a total of 153 volumes, but it was discontinued in 1809, and there are no records to indicate the extent of its growth by that time. Several other attempts to start a public library during the nineteenth century failed. The first successful effort occurred in 1898, when the Meriden Public Library was established with funds raised by the Thursday Morning Club, an organization of Meriden women which is still in existence. They sponsored a series of successful lectures to make the project possible. On January 30, 1899, they opened a reading room in a house on the site of the Masonic Temple.

In 1900, Mrs. Augusta Munson Curtis, widow of George R. Curtis, offered to spend \$5,000 on the site for a public library and to contribute \$25,000 toward the erection of the building if the city would agree to appropriate \$3,000 annually for maintenance. A special town meeting on March 12, 1901 accepted the offer, and the Curtis Memorial Library was erected at the location chosen, at the corner of East Main and Pleasant Streets at a cost of approximately \$750,000 for building, site, and equipment. The design by Richard Williams, New Haven architect, is classical, in the Greek tradition.

Miss Corinne A. Deshon was the first librarian. She had been



## PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

in charge of the previous Meriden Public Library, and was well equipped for the position which she filled until her retirement in 1927, when she was succeeded by Miss Martha Bartlett. Miss Bartlett served for 18 years, retiring in 1946. She was succeeded by Ransom L. Richardson, who undertook a program of expansion, the effects of which are still visible. James L. Hillard followed Mr. Richardson, and served until his acceptance of a position with the U. S. Military Academy at West Point. Miss Marion Cook is now in charge of the library's services.

The need for a branch library on the west side was stressed as early as 1930 by Miss Bartlett, but there were many delays before branch facilities were finally opened in September 1945 in the Professional Building at West Main and Maple Streets. Since its opening, this branch has more than doubled its original circulation of about 30,000 books annually. The library also maintains eight stations in the schools.

The use of the library has shown continuous gains in almost every category of circulated materials. In the city's annual report, published last year, the total circulation of volumes lent for home use was 231,035, and, for the whole year of 1955, this figure was materially increased. The library maintains a reference service, and is microfilming its newspaper files. A collection of musical recordings and a wide selection of art books are among the materials available in its departments. Its collection of children's books is among its more popular features. Large numbers of school children make use of its facilities.

### THE CURTIS HOME

The Curtis Home on Crown Street was founded by the late Lemuel J. Curtis, who provided the funds for its construction. It was erected in conjunction with the work of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

The first building was dedicated in 1884 as a home for children. Mr. Curtis died in 1888, leaving funds for the maintenance of the institution, and also making it possible to erect another building for the care of elderly women. The second structure was built in 1894.

In 1905 an addition was constructed as a facility for manual training for the boys in the home. The same building was later

converted into a gymnasium. In 1950, it became a 25-bed infirmary for the women residents.

Thirty children and 36 women now live at the Curtis Home. A homelike atmosphere prevails at the institution, which is under the supervision of Miss Helen Stevens.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

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### Organizations

THE SCOPE of this volume does not permit a resumé of all Meriden organizations. There are scores of clubs, fraternities, church groups and other associations in addition to those mentioned in this chapter.

The histories presented here constitute only a limited selection, dictated largely by the arbitrary boundary of allotted space.

#### MERIDEN COMMUNITY FUND

The Meriden Community Fund was organized in 1929 by a group of public spirited citizens in recognition of the growing problem created by the multiplicity of fund-raising drives for local welfare organizations. The value of most of these causes was not questioned, but some of them were failing to obtain the support they deserved because appeals came too frequently. It was also becoming more and more difficult to round up volunteer canvassers, because many persons were being asked again and again during the same year to undertake this kind of work. The Community Fund, by combining the major appeals, was able to perform the same tasks much more effectively and, in addition, to furnish assurance to the public that its contributions would be carefully and openly accounted for and put to the best possible uses.

Since the year of its establishment, the Community Fund has raised \$3,909,078 in its annual campaigns. The amount raised in the 1956 campaign was \$181,450 for the 15 agency members, including the Boy Scouts, Boys' Club, Diocesan Bureau of Social Service, Family Service Association, Girl Scouts, Girls' Club, Meriden Hospital, Public Health and Visiting Nurse Association, "News from Home," Salvation Army, St. Rose Community Center, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., Meriden Community Fund and Council, U. S. O.

The active management of the Community Fund is controlled by its executive and budget committees which function at regular meetings and special meetings called throughout the year. The

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office is in charge of a salaried director, who is usually present to furnish detailed information at committee meetings. The budget committee scrutinizes thoroughly the budgets submitted by each agency member, and the campaign goal is arrived at after all budgets have been surveyed and approved.

On the board of directors, each agency in the Fund is represented, and there are also 25 members at large. The annual meeting is held in April, when officers are elected, together with six new board members to replace those whose terms are expiring.

Approximately 135 citizens make up advisory groups which are called into consultation during the year.

### THE MERIDEN Y.M.C.A.

The Meriden Y.M.C.A. dates back to 1866, but its organization was probably influenced by the presence of the Meriden Young Men's Institute established in 1853. The Institute's outstanding accomplishment was to arrange for the visit of Henry Ward Beecher, famous orator, to deliver an address at the dedication of the Town Hall.

The first meetings of the Y.M.C.A. were held in the rooms of a local church, where lecture programs were presented. During the first year, \$7,000 was raised to make it possible to obtain permanent quarters in the building which stood where Boynton's Inc. is now located. In 1872, a paid secretary was engaged to administer the program.

As the result of a campaign in 1875, the association obtained more than \$20,000 to erect a new building on the same site as the quarters which it had been occupying. Contributors were assured that for 50 years, dating from the Y's establishment, it would be used only for Y.M.C.A. purposes.

In 1885 the first general secretary was hired. The position was filled by the janitor who had cared for the rooms. In the same year, a telephone was installed. Later, facilities for baths were provided, although the board feared they might overflow, causing damage to the building. In 1895, the first petition was presented for bowling alleys. The Lincoln Street tennis courts were added to the association's facilities in 1901.

A proposal to erect a new building was brought before the directors in 1907, but 14 years were to elapse before this goal was reached. The necessary funds were finally raised in 1921, and



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the present building on West Main Street was erected, providing facilities for all Y.M.C.A. activities, and a dormitory which has been fully occupied almost from the time when it was opened. But much rearrangement has been necessary, and many new facilities have been added up to the present. Further expansion is being planned for the near future. The association's membership has increased from year to year, and its services to members have increased correspondingly, while its work in education and the direction of youth activities has grown also.

The war, with its attendant gasoline shortage, saw the passing of the Y Community Forum, which, for 11 years, had attracted an average of 1,000 persons for each series. It also saw the establishment of a teen-age project which has enrolled each year an average of 1,000 young persons for 40 Saturday nights, with an average attendance of 300 at each meeting of the Co-Ed Night Club.

Since 1941, the association has invested \$73,920 in capital improvements. A city-wide campaign for complete modernization will be conducted in April 1957.

### THE MERIDEN Y.W.C.A.

The Meriden Y.W.C.A. had its origin in the Young Woman's League formed here in 1890 under the sponsorship of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In March 1893, the society was reorganized as the Y.W.C.A., with Mrs. C. H. Youngs as president.

At first the Y.W.C.A. had its headquarters in Bushnell's Block, 77 West Main Street. Classes in practical nursing, gymnastics, bookkeeping, German, grammar, and writing were formed, and an employment bureau was opened. In 1894, larger quarters were occupied in the same building. The Y.W.C.A. became affiliated with the national organization about that time.

The day nursery was started in 1895. In 1897, a vacation house was opened on West Peak, which was occupied during the summers for a long term of years.

The present buildings on Crown Street were erected and dedicated in 1908, and the day nursery was continued at that location. In 1940, the nursery was discontinued. Occupancy of the dormitory has continued high.

Many clubs with special purposes, formed within the organi-

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zation, fit into the Y.W.C.A.'s extensive program for girls and women.

### MERIDEN BOYS' CLUB

The Meriden Boys' Club, affiliated with the national organization of Boys' Clubs, was founded in 1888. From the beginning, it has provided a place for the recreational activities of teen-age boys, with facilities for sports and games and other varied interests. Its headquarters at 9 Veteran Street have long been recognized as inadequate, and the movement to erect a new club began as far back as the 1930's. Plans matured in 1955, and a campaign was undertaken to raise a building fund of \$250,000. This goal was oversubscribed to the extent of about \$40,000. Construction of the new building, on a site at the corner of Colony and Washington Streets, opposite the Meriden Post Office, is now well advanced. The club has a membership of more than 1,000 boys. Joseph F. Coffey is the director.

### MERIDEN GIRLS' CLUB

The Meriden Girls' Club was launched in October 1919, sponsored by the Meriden Woman's Club, and intended originally to promote worthwhile activities among older girls. Later, girls in the younger age brackets became eligible as members. For some years, the club occupied rented quarters on Colony Street. In 1937, it moved into the Italian-American Club building on Grove Street. In 1951, the club fell heir to the Platt home on Lincoln Street, residence of the late Senator Orville Platt, and occupied for many years by his widow. The club moved into these new quarters in 1953, but soon found that the space was inadequate for its expanded activities. In February 1956, a campaign was launched to raise a building fund of \$75,000, which will permit the construction of a well-designed addition. Miss Betty Rice is executive director of the club.

### BOY SCOUTS

The Boy Scout movement in Meriden began after the national movement started in 1910. Its 46th anniversary was celebrated in February 1956. The Central Connecticut Council, Boy Scouts of America, now has a membership of more than 2,000 boys and adults in the area of its jurisdiction, which includes Meriden,



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Wallingford, and Southington. It is the sixth oldest council in Connecticut. John G. Nagel was the first president. The first professional executive director was E. D. Curtis, in 1916-17, followed by John D. Roberts. 1917-1939. Since that time, Harry S. Hanson has served as executive director.

### GIRL SCOUTS

The Meriden Girl Scout Council was formed 26 years ago, and affiliated with the national organization which celebrated its 44th anniversary in March this year.

The council is divided into four districts, with from 15 to 30 troops in each district, each under a chairman assisted by troop organizers and consultants.

The first troop was organized in Meriden in 1918. There were 13 troops when the council was incorporated in 1929. Today there are 78 troops with 1,665 girl and adult members, 200 more than last year. Mrs. Louis Desrochers is president. Fourteen new troops, Brownie, intermediate and senior, have come into existence since last year. They are sponsored by churches and schools, some schools having two or three units.

Camp Glen Echo off Paddock Avenue is sponsored by the council. It is a summer day-camp conducted for six weeks each season.

Mrs. Catherine F. McNulty is executive director. The first director was Mrs. Emily Greely.

### PUBLIC HEALTH AND VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION

The Meriden Public Health and Visiting Nurse Association is the outgrowth of the Working Men's Free Bed Fund, which was organized here in 1907 for tuberculosis control. In 1908, it became the Meriden Anti-Tuberculosis Association, and obtained support through five-cent weekly deductions from the pay of factory employees willing to subscribe. In 1910, the name was changed to the Meriden Tuberculosis Relief Association, and the first visiting nurse was employed. Distribution of Christmas seals also began at that time. A group from the association helped in remodeling the old town farm building, a project which was the genesis of Undercliff Sanatorium. In 1922, the association combined with the Visiting Nurses to form the present organization. Miss Elizabeth Bigelow was the first director, serving until her

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death in 1941, when Miss Jessie Halbert, the present director, was appointed to the position.

### SALVATION ARMY

The Salvation Army was first organized in Meriden in 1911, when the Citadel was built on Pratt Street. In 1940, in the will of Mrs. James A. Curtis, funds were provided for the construction of an addition which was dedicated in 1941. The front section was remodeled, and a new wing was erected at the back, with a gymnasium and basketball court on the second floor, showers and lockers. In charge in 1956 is Capt. John J. Phelan.

### MERIDEN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Meriden Chamber of Commerce is the outgrowth of the Meriden Board of Trade, which was organized in May 1896, and incorporated in 1902. In 1908, it was reincorporated and united with the Meriden Business Men's Association. It continued under that name until 1915, when the name changed to the Meriden Chamber of Commerce, Inc. First president of the Business Men's Association was Frank E. Sands. First secretary, in 1908, was Albert A. May.

In 1915, offices were established in the Hall & Lewis Building, now the Cherniack Building, and remained there for many years. H. N. Clark became executive secretary in 1917. Charles A. Newton became executive secretary in 1932, and has held that office up to the present, with the exception of a period during World War II, when Hollis D. Immick served as temporary secretary while Mr. Newton was with the War Production Board in New Haven.

The Chamber of Commerce has helped to promote the best business and industrial interests of Meriden from the beginning, and has succeeded in bringing many new industries here. Affiliated with it is the Merchant's Bureau, which has its own officers.

Bernard D. Kasack is president of the Chamber of Commerce and E. W. Graffam is chairman of the Merchant's Bureau.

### JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Organized after World War II to encourage civic enterprise and promote community betterment, the Junior Chamber of Commerce is an active group of business and professional men in



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the younger age brackets. It has sponsored annual products shows, collected food and clothing for flood victims, and assisted in numerous campaigns. Each year it honors the "Young Man of the Year" selected through widely distributed ballots. Another of its goals is to foster safe driving by teen-agers.

### THE MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION

The Manufacturers' Association of Meriden was organized in June 1919 and incorporated in 1920 to consider questions of manufacturing interest and encourage cooperation and industrial progress. The principal Wallingford manufacturers affiliated with the group, and the association serves both communities, a fact which was recognized by the addition of Wallingford to the name. William J. Wilcox is executive secretary, and offices are maintained at 43½ Colony Street.

The Employers' Association, an even older organization, kept a separate identity until 1942, when the two organizations were merged.

The late Clifford R. Gardinor was the first president of the Manufacturers' Association, serving in 1920, 1921 and 1922. The late Charles G. Phelps of Wallingford was the first secretary, and held the position until his death in 1925.

Mr. Wilcox, the present secretary, assumed his duties in 1926.

The association has taken part in many worth-while civic projects for the benefit of Meriden and Wallingford, and was active in the promotion of building in periods of housing shortage.

In addition to Mr. Gardinor, the following have served as president: W. H. Walther, Charles H. Cuno, William F. Handel, Glover Snow, Parker B. Allen, Milton L. Gearing, Albert W. Savage, Clifford I. Packer, W. Oden Hughart, John R. Sexton, Robert W. Clark, William H. Grinold, Philip B. Watson, Harry T. Burgess, and Norman J. Stringer. Mr. Stringer holds the office at present.

### UNITED VETERANS' COUNCIL

A movement for an organization to include all groups of Meriden war veterans was started in 1945, when 10 posts and chapters gathered at the invitation of Charles L. Upham Camp, Sons of Union Veterans, to discuss the feasibility of the plan. From this beginning, the United Veterans' Council resulted, and has been

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active for the last 10 years. It was largely instrumental in the successful campaign for the World War II Veterans' Memorial Hospital, and has also loaned its influence to other local efforts on the behalf of veterans.

Every veterans' organization in Meriden is included in its membership, which embraces the following:

Sons of Union Veterans, Charles L. Upham Camp No. 7; United Spanish War Veterans, Charles B. Bowen Camp; Veterans of Foreign Wars, La Croix Murdock Post No. 585; Yankee Division Veterans Association, Feegel-Tyler Chapter; the American Legion, Meriden Post No. 45; Jewish War Veterans, Post No. 92; Italian-American World War Veterans, D'Amico Post No. 7; Marine Corps League, Silver City Detachment; Military Order of the Purple Heart, Meriden Chapter; Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 6; Polish American Veterans, Meriden Post; Catholic War Veterans, Mount Carmel Post No. 1053; Catholic War Veterans, St. Joseph Post No. 1106; Catholic War Veterans, St. Rose Post No. 1116; Catholic War Veterans, St. Laurent Post No. 1135; Catholic War Veterans, St. Mary Post No. 1136.

Also the following women's auxiliaries:

Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Italian-American War Veterans, Marine Corps League, Disabled American Veterans, Polish American Veterans, Gold Star Association.

### AMERICAN LEGION, MERIDEN POST 45

Post 45, American Legion, was founded September 18, 1919, two days after Congress granted a charter to the national Legion organization. For several years, it occupied the Coe home on East Main Street, and remained at that location until 1923, when the property was sold to become the site of the Masonic Temple. The W. G. Warnock property at 212 Colony Street was purchased, and continued to serve as the post's headquarters until 1946, when the Legionnaires decided that it would be inadvisable to remodel it, and it was sold to provide new headquarters for the Meriden Public Health and Visiting Nurse Association. Temporarily, the Legion established quarters in the Winthrop Hotel while plans for a new home were being discussed.

Several proposals were considered and rejected before Marchand C. Blatchley, post commander at the time, announced on



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July 19, 1950 the signing of contracts for a Legion Home on property acquired at the former site of Hanover Park in South Meriden which was rechristened Legion Park. The building was designed by Lorenzo Hamilton, architect, and was planned to furnish modern accommodations for all Legion activities.

The new home in Legion Park was dedicated May 20, 1951 with appropriate ceremonies. Since then, it has been the scene of many events of the active Legion program. It is used also by the Legion Auxiliary, which was founded about a year after the post was established.

### SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Captain John Couch Branch No. 2, Connecticut Society, Sons of the American Revolution, held its first meeting in the Winthrop Hotel on Feb. 28, 1893. Present were H. Wales Lines, E. J. Doolittle, Arthur Proudman, W. W. Lee, Charles Rockwell, S. S. Peck, M. F. Griswold, M. B. Schenck, LeGrand Bevins, George C. Merriman, George E. Savage, and George N. Bowers. A committee of five was named to draw up a constitution and by-laws and to apply to the Connecticut Society for a charter, which was soon granted.

### SERVICE CLUBS

Seven active service organizations, all with national affiliations, have contributed much to Meriden's civic welfare in the years since the first service club was organized here.

The Meriden Rotary Club, chartered April 1, 1921, was the first service club in the city.

The Meriden Lions Club was organized in 1923, and chartered a year later.

The Meriden Exchange Club was also organized in 1923, and received its charter March 25, 1924.

The Meriden Kiwanis Club was established here in 1930.

These were the pioneer service clubs for men. Service clubs for women began nationally as far back as 1919, when Zonta International was formed. The Meriden Zonta Club was organized in 1935.

Soroptimist International of Meriden was chartered in 1949.

The Unison Club is another service organization. It was founded here in 1953.

## ORGANIZATIONS

### WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Ruth Hart Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, was the sixth chapter in Connecticut, and was organized in 1893. Mrs. Levi E. Coe was its first president. It has the perpetual care of Meeting House Hill Burying Ground.

Susan Carrington Clarke Chapter, D. A. R., was organized in 1895. Mrs. Kate Foote Coe was its first regent.

The Meriden Colony of the National Society of New England Women was formed in 1927, a branch of the national society which began in 1895.

The City Mission Society, organized in 1886, through the efforts of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, is Meriden's oldest women's organization.

But the Meriden Charity Club also has a long history. It was established in 1897 by 12 high school girls, members of a whist club, who sought an outlet for their time and energies in charitable work, and has been continuously active since that time.

The Meriden Woman's Club, largest of the women's organizations, was organized in 1917. First president was Mrs. William Rice Smith, and the charter membership included 325 women. The Thursday Morning Club, mentioned elsewhere for its connection with the foundation of a public library here, helped the new club in sponsoring lectures. Since that time, the activities of the club have been many and varied in worth-while causes.

The Meriden Junior Woman's Club started in April 1947, with Mrs. Marion Hawkins as its first president. Its membership is limited to 250 women in the lower age brackets.

The Meriden Business and Professional Women's Club, an affiliate of a national organization, was chartered in 1953.

### THE HOME CLUB

The Home Club, 128 Colony Street, was located originally in the Byxbee Block on Colony Street. In May 1893 it voted to erect the present building, which was designed and furnished for its own needs.

In 1946, the club instituted an \$80,000 building program, under which the building was completely remodeled, and an addition measuring 18 by 44 feet was constructed in the rear. The dining room was greatly enlarged and the kitchen was nearly trebled



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in size. The bar was relocated. Facilities were provided for serving meals to wives and guests of members. Luncheon and dinner service is available on week days.

The club has a membership of more than 300, among which many leaders of the business and industrial community are represented.

### THE TURNER SOCIETY

The Turner Society, one of Meriden's oldest organizations, was organized in 1866. A young group of German immigrants formed it to continue the gymnastic exercises they had practiced in their native land. Originally, there were 46 members, but the membership grew rapidly as similar groups were launched throughout New England. In 1868 a house on State Street Extension was obtained and remodeled as Turner Hall. Eventually, larger quarters were found on Pratt Street, and later on Butler Street. During the 80's and 90's and in the early part of this century, Turner competitions on a state-wide basis were frequent. A large meeting was held here during the Centennial, when hundreds took part. In recent years, the organization has concentrated on choral singing. The singing groups have won a number of prizes in competitions with similar groups throughout the state.

### MERIDEN LODGE No. 35, B. P. O. E.

Meriden Lodge No. 35, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, received its dispensation on June 19, 1885, and was instituted the following week on June 26, in Grand Army hall. The formal charter was granted December 12, 1886. There were 27 charter members.

The lodge continued to meet in Grand Army hall until a room was fitted up for its purposes in the Cashen building on State Street. Later, it moved into quarters in the Wilcox Block, and met in Colonial hall for a number of years. The next change in location was to a brick addition in the rear of the old Richmond home on East Main Street. In 1922, a committee was named to start a building fund.

The present clubhouse, opened in 1928, marked the culmination of more than five years of fund-raising activities. It is a substantial brick building, conveniently planned for the Elks' purposes, handsomely furnished, and completely equipped throughout.

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The order has made many civic contributions during its long existence, mainly of a charitable and patriotic nature. It has a large and active membership in the community.

### MASONIC LODGES

The members of the Masonic fraternity in Meriden long held their meetings in the Palace Block, but sought for years to find ways and means of erecting a temple for all branches of the organization. A committee of 50 Masons was appointed in 1921 to take the necessary steps toward this project. In 1923, it submitted a petition to the state legislature to authorize the Masonic Temple Foundation with a capital stock of \$25,000 to be held in equal shares by the following Masonic bodies: Meridian Lodge No. 77, Center Lodge No. 97, Keystone Chapter No. 27, Hamilton Council No. 22, and St. Elmo Commandery, No. 9. The foundation charter was granted and ratified by all these bodies.

The incorporators, after receiving this authority, purchased the Coe property on East Main Street then occupied by the American Legion. A successful campaign for funds followed, and the present Masonic Temple, designed by Walter T. Arnold, was erected by the H. Wales Lines Company. Mr. Lines, a prominent Mason, had been identified with the movement for a temple from the beginning. Ground for the building was broken on May 4, 1927 by Eli C. Birdsey, president emeritus of the Foundation. The temple was dedicated November 10, 1928, and has since served as headquarters for all the Masonic bodies in Meriden. On November 10, 1952, the mortgage on the property was burned by Frank E. Kay, who had then served 25 years as president of the Masonic Temple Foundation.

### KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

Silver City Council No. 2, Knights of Columbus, was the second council to be instituted in the largest Roman Catholic fraternal society in the world. The institution took place on May 16, 1883. The Rev. Fr. A. Van Oppen of St. Laurent's Church was the first chaplain, and the organization met for a time in the basement of the church. Later, it moved into quarters in the Wilcox Block.

As the organization grew and strengthened, its members became determined to possess their own home. This goal was realized with the purchase of the dwelling at 377 Broad Street. It was



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remodeled and suitably furnished, and was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies on June 12, 1949, when the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph M. Griffin, permanent rector of St. Rose Church, delivered the dedicatory address.

### EAGLES

The Fraternal Order of Eagles has a commodious clubhouse at 66 Crown Street. A large addition was erected in 1937, and there have been several enlargements since that time, with a complete renovation of the interior, and complete facilities for the organization's many activities. One of Meriden's older fraternal societies, it has a large and active membership.

### FALCONS

Falcon Nest 68 was organized in 1906 by a group of Polish-American residents, and is observing its fiftieth anniversary in the same year as Meriden's Sesquicentennial. The first president was Stanislaus Iwanicki. The Falcon Athletic Association has a clubhouse at 43 Olive Street, built in 1912. Falcon Park, 210 Westfield Road, was opened in 1949. It is a large tract, comprising an athletic field, with adjacent club building and pavilion. The first buildings erected there were burned in February 1951, and have since been replaced.

### MOOSE CLUB

The Moose Club maintains headquarters at 138 Colony Street, formerly the home of George W. Lyon, which was purchased by the local chapter of the Loyal Order of Moose in 1933.

## CHAPTER FORTY

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### Meriden Churches

BROAD STREET on a Sunday morning presented a goodly spectacle as the 19th century reached the half-way mark. The five churches which mothered many of the present houses of worship were ranged between East Main and Charles Streets, on what is now the Memorial Boulevard. Coaches and carriages filled with prominent citizens from all areas of the town congregated in the area, and hundreds more of the humbler parishioners made the weekly pilgrimage on foot.

On the corner where it still stands was the Center Congregational Church, composed of members who had decided to reorganize and continue their worship at this historic spot when the First Congregational Church was established in the present downtown area. Next to it stood, and still stands, the First Baptist Church. Just south of this the Methodist Society had erected a house of worship. Saint Andrew's Parish had just built a new structure of Gothic design at the corner of what is now Charles Street. To the south of this the newly organized Roman Catholic Church, dedicated to St. Rose of Lima, held worship in the building formerly used by the Episcopal congregation.

The First Congregational Church's new building on Colony Street was the first to reflect the surge of growth to the west. It was used until 1876, when the present building, a block to the north of it, was completed. This new edifice cost \$175,000 and was recognized throughout the state as an outstanding example of church architecture.

Extensive remodeling and redecoration were undertaken in 1929 in preparation for the church's 200th anniversary. A building program to add room for educational and church-sponsored community activities and to modernize existing facilities is currently being carried on.

Church records list the names of 21 ministers who have served the church in its 225 years. Outstanding among them in more recent times is that of the Rev. Dr. Albert J. Lord, who ministered to the congregation between 1903 and 1938. The present pastor



is the Rev. William F. Edge, who began his duties in 1951.

The Center Congregational Church has continued to carry on its program of worship, education, and good works in the lovely old building on Broad Street which is widely recognized as typical of the best in early 19th century churches. In the 1870's the growth of the congregation made necessary a building program which extended the building 20 feet to the west, adding a new lecture room and parlors. Further improvements were made in the 1890's and again in 1916. The Rev. Ray Marcus Miller is the present pastor.

In 1847 the Baptists moved into their new church next to the Center Congregational Church building. The house of worship of the First Baptist Church is another example of the best in post-colonial architecture, and one of which its members are justly proud. For many years it maintained the Olive Branch Chapel as a mission school and it has been generous in the spiritual and financial support which it has provided for its offshoots which grew into separate churches as the city expanded. Its pastor is the Rev. Fred L. Shiffer.

Less than 20 years after the completion of its stone church on Broad Street, the parishioners of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church decided to construct a new building farther to the west to meet the growing trend in that direction. Much of the present edifice, standing diagonally across from the entrance to the City Hall, was built with stone from the razed church. The new building was dedicated in 1867 and has served the congregation, with improvements and modernizations, until the present day. Extensive modernization and redecoration were completed in 1953.

St. Andrew's was served by the Rev. Giles H. Deshon from 1850 to 1883 and by the Rev. Arthur T. Randall from 1883 to 1926, a total of 76 years. The Rev. John S. Kromer is the present rector.

Methodism established a permanent station in Meriden in 1847, and until 1867 the congregation was housed in the meeting house on Broad Street. In that year a large stone church was built on the present site at the corner of East Main and Pleasant Streets and was in use until it was destroyed by fire in 1941. In 1912 the Rogers Memorial Building was erected to house parish activities, at a cost of \$50,000.

The early history of the First Methodist Church is marked

by more than one instance in which its members showed their generosity and gave their support to people of other denominations that were struggling to establish themselves. After the disastrous fire which wiped out the church and severely damaged the memorial building, the congregation of St. Paul's Universalist Church across the street showed the same kind of generosity in return when they shared their Sunday worship services with the homeless Methodists. The new Methodist Church which rose on the site of the old was completed in 1949, at an estimated cost of \$285,000. It is a beautiful edifice of brick and white-painted wood, colonial in inspiration, and an outstanding addition to the group of public buildings which clusters around this area.

With the opening of the railroad in 1839 a new contingent of Meriden citizens began to arrive. To minister to their spiritual needs St. Rose Church, the mother Roman Catholic parish of Meriden, was organized in 1848, with missions in Wallingford, Cheshire and Southington attached. Regular services were held in the building on Broad Street purchased from the Episcopal congregation until 1856, when a church at the present location on Center Street was built. Even before removal to the new building, the church had begun parochial school classes for its children.

During the first quarter-century in the new location a new parochial school was built, along with a convent and a chapel for the Sisters of Mercy who came from County Clare, Ireland, to teach in the school.

Enlargements were made to house the growing membership in 1868 and again in 1882. In 1883 the parish was the fourth largest in the state. The present church edifice was formally consecrated in 1926. Another milestone of this period was passed with the erection of St. Rose Community Building.

A program of building and enlargement is currently in progress under the direction of the Right Reverend Monsignor Joseph M. Griffin, permanent rector of St. Rose Church since 1947.

Authentic records place the founding of the South Meriden Methodist Church in 1851, when meetings were first held in the village schoolhouse, and an ecclesiastical society was formed. The Methodist Preaching House was built the same year at the cost of \$1,333, with the ground floor of the building to be rented as living quarters for the sake of economy.

Until 1871 preaching was done on a supply basis by students



at Wesleyan. Later a regular supply minister serving several parishes officiated. The first resident minister was appointed in 1884. Currently occupying the pulpit is the Reverend Kenneth B. Welliver. Extensive improvements and enlargements over the years have enabled the church to carry on community responsibilities as well as serving as a house of worship.

Formerly known as St. Paul's Universalist Church, the First Universalist Church was formally chartered in 1854. In 1860 a small wooden building was erected at the present site on the corner of Norwood and East Main Streets to house the growing congregation. The society was placed on a permanent basis in 1862.

Rapid growth of the congregation during the 1880's resulted in the need for a larger church and the present massive edifice was dedicated in 1893. The old building was removed to the corner of Norwood and Liberty Streets and was used temporarily for town and city offices after the Town Hall burned in 1904.

In the years since the new century began, the church has received valuable gifts and bequests from its members which have enhanced its beauty and usefulness, and has been renovated and modernized. The Rev. William E. Gardner is the present minister.

The Main Street Baptist Church began its ministry in 1860 when 14 members of the First Baptist Church were granted letters of dismissal to start a West Meriden Baptist Church. Its location at the corner of Crown and East Main Streets is a reflection of the shifting population and growth in the city subsequent to the coming of the railroad. Its early years during the Civil War were hard, but by 1868 the chapel which had served early worshippers was supplanted by the brick building which still stands today and which is the oldest church building in the center of the city.

The present name was assumed when the old name of West Meriden went out of ordinary usage. During its history it has done outstanding work with young people and has welcomed Baptists coming to Meriden from foreign lands. Russian Baptists from Meriden and surrounding communities are among the members of the congregation today. Present pastor at the church is the Rev. William V. Allen.

St. John's Lutheran Church was founded in 1865, just after the end of the Civil War, by citizens of German descent, and its first

## MERIDEN CHURCHES

meeting was held in the courtroom at the Town Hall. The Pennsylvania Synod, which had encouraged the Meriden Lutherans in their attempts to set up a congregation, sent a pastor and in 1867 the first church was built and dedicated. Membership increased rapidly and an addition was soon necessary.

In 1886 a parochial school was opened, which was to continue until it was finally closed last year. English services were instituted and the parish hall was built and equipped during the 37-year pastorate of the Rev. S. F. Glaser, who began his duties in 1900. The Rev. Adolph H. Wismar is the present pastor.

Another group of German immigrants founded the Liberty Street Baptist Church, which was organized in 1874 as the "German Baptist Society." Ten years of meetings in private homes had preceded the church's formal establishment. A site on the corner of Liberty and Twiss Streets was purchased, and the small congregation erected the building which is still used today.

Change to the present name occurred after the First World War, at which time English was adopted for use in the church's wider ministry. During the last 30 years extensive alterations and improvements have been made to the church and parsonage. The present pastor is the Rev. August Lutz.

In 1880, St. Laurent's Roman Catholic Church was organized to minister to the needs of the many French-Canadian and German Catholics who had worshipped at St. Rose's. The Rev. Alphonsus John Henry Van Oppen, who spoke German, French, and English, was the first pastor and served for almost 40 years. The church building on Camp Street was begun and its basement put into use in 1881, and the completed structure was blessed in 1888. By 1894 a parochial school building, a convent, and the rectory had been completed.

The present pastor, Rev. Edward A. Mathieu, assumed his duties in 1945, and is the fourth to have charge of the parish since its foundation. Many improvements on the school and the convent, and the complete renovation of the exterior of the church have been made during his pastorate.

Trinity Methodist Church was organized in answer to the city's downtown and westward growth. Its first meetings in 1885 were held in the Y.M.C.A. building, then located on Colony Street, and it made arrangements to share with the South Meriden Methodists the services of their preacher. In 1887 a chapel was



completed and opened for worship on West Main Street, just east of Butler Street and the minister was put on a full-time basis.

Growth of the church membership in the ensuing years led to the purchase of the present site on West Main Street on the corner of Cook Avenue, and the erection of the church building which is still in use was completed in 1895. Numerous improvements and enlargements have been made since. The Rev. Robert Stith, pastor, resigned in March of this year.

All Saints' Episcopal Church on West Main Street is another church built to serve the increasing parish to the west. Services were first held in this part of town in 1885 by the rector of Saint Andrew's, and the number that attended soon outgrew the private homes and other quarters in which they met.

A bequest from the widow of a former rector was the basis of the building drive for the new church, and parishioners of Saint Andrew's were generous in their support of the new parish. The church was built and consecrated in 1893 and has subsequently been enlarged and improved. For many years the rectors of All Saints' have also served as priests-in-charge of St. John's Episcopal Church in Yalesville. The Rev. Richard Elting is at present the rector of All Saints'.

Next to the Methodist Church on East Main Street, across from the City Hall, and one of the cluster of religious edifices in this area, Temple B'Nai Abraham's location is an effective reminder of the friendship and brotherhood of Meriden's religious institutions. It was completed in 1952 and is an impressive brick building for worship and community service, with a large wing containing classrooms where the Hebrew language and traditions are taught.

The first Hebrew religious society was organized informally in 1887, 15 years after the first Jewish families came to Meriden. Two years later an official charter was obtained and in 1891 the first synagogue was erected on Cedar Street. The cornerstone for a new and larger place of worship, also on Cedar Street, was laid in 1908 and this building served until the erection of the present Temple. Rabbi Albert Troy is the present spiritual leader.

Holy Angels' Church in South Meriden was built in 1887 as a mission church to care for the spiritual needs of members of St. Rose Parish living in that area. It was made a separate parish in 1888.

The Rev. Eugene A. Moriarty has been pastor of Holy Angels'

since 1950. His predecessor was the Rev. Walter A. McCrann, who served the parish for more than two decades. The church has grown in recent years and a chapel in the basement of the church and two classrooms in the rectory have been added to accommodate the expansion. Extensive new building plans are in a formative stage. Plans for the erection of the Roman Catholic church in Yalesville have been under the direction of the South Meriden parish.

The Parker African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was begun as a missionary service conducted in local homes to care for the spiritual needs of Meriden's Negro families in the 1880's. It is named for Charles Parker, Meriden's first mayor, who contributed generously to the founding and construction of the church on Court Street.

Outstanding in its rolls of pastors is Mrs. Zoe Walters who served the church from 1930 to 1945. Membership has reflected the number of Negro families in Meriden which for many years was very small but which has increased rapidly since 1942. A building program to increase the church's beauty and facilities for service is being planned. The present pastor is the Rev. George C. Battle.

Founded by newly arrived Swedish immigrants who wanted a spiritual home in which their native language was spoken, the Park Avenue Baptist Church began its ministry as the Swedish Baptist Church. For a time its services were held in a small hall on Britannia Street and at the Main Street Baptist Church. The present building was completed and dedicated in 1890.

Since 1923 enlargement of the membership to include people of many national backgrounds has caused the use of English in all church services. The Park Avenue Church has over the years shown special interest and devotion to the fields of foreign service and to youth organizations. Under the ministry of the present pastor, the Rev. Herbert R. Peterson, who has served since 1932, extensive improvements and additions to the church have been made.

The Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church was organized by a group previously affiliated with St. John's Lutheran Church. Immigrants of German descent, they wanted a church where their own language was spoken and English services were first introduced into the church and Bible School in 1910. A church



organization was set up in 1889 and the present site on the corner of Cook Avenue and Hanover Street was settled on for a church location. The First Lutheran Church of Southington sought affiliation and the two congregations worshipped as one parish until 1914. The Rev. C. Reinhold Tappert served as pastor in the early years, from 1889 to 1912.

On New Year's Eve, 1917, fire destroyed the church completely. For several months services were conducted in the parish house of St. John's, and later a building on West Main Street was rented. Immanuel's parishioners decided to begin their rebuilding program with a parish house, which was completed in 1920. The main church building was dedicated in 1925. Further improvement and expansion was accomplished under the leadership of Rev. George A. Hagedorn, who came here as pastor in 1943 and served until his death in December 1955. The Rev. Oscar Werner then became supply pastor.

Meriden residents of Swedish birth formed the religious society which became Augustana Lutheran Church. The first meetings in 1889 resulted in the formal organization of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Meriden and the purchase in 1891 of the present church site on Center Street. Ground was broken for the new church in 1895 and the men of the parish did much of the work of erecting the building. It served until 1934, when it was destroyed by fire.

Plans for new building began at once. It was finally completed in 1939, the congregation worshipping in the basement while building and fund-raising went forward. The present program of worship and service is carried on under the pastorate of Rev. Charles R. Bomgren who began his duties in 1952.

St. Mary's Parish was founded in 1890 to serve as the spiritual home of the German Catholics who had previously worshipped at St. Laurent's. A wooden edifice was built on Church Street to serve as church, parochial school, and convent and was dedicated in 1891. The cornerstone of the present church building was laid in 1912 on the site of the first wooden church, which was moved to Grove Street to make room for it. Solidly built of brick and Gothic in design, it was completed in 1913.

Since its beginning, St. Mary's has been under the care of four regular pastors. One, the Rev. Nicholas F. X. Schneider, served for nearly 35 years until his death in 1935. During the last two

decades important expansion has gone forward. The combined school, convent, and parish hall were erected in 1937, and a new rectory has been added. The present pastor, the Rev. B. J. Butcher, has served since 1949.

Italian Catholic residents of Meriden, living mainly on the west side, were provided with their own place of worship when in 1894 a wooden church was erected for their use on Goodwill Avenue. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church held its worship services in this building until 1935 when plans for badly needed expansion matured to produce the present church building on Lewis Avenue. It is of yellow brick faced with artificial stone, and is a free adaptation of the Lombard style of architecture seen in central Italy.

During the pastorate of the Rev. Walter J. Lyddy, who served from 1930 to 1947, the church acquired by purchase from the city a parochial school building which has the only complete junior high school program among the city's parochial schools. The Rev. John J. Kelly is the present pastor.

By 1895 St. Rose parish had increased in numbers and in area so that services for people on the west side of Meriden were being held on West Main Street, in a building purchased from the Trinity Methodists. In 1901 St. Joseph's parish was formally authorized, to serve that part of Meriden west of the railroad. The cornerstone for the new church, between Goodwill and Lewis Avenues on West Main Street, was laid in 1902, and the former chapel was put to use as a parochial school.

A continuous program of building and improvement has marked St. Joseph's progress. The school building was dedicated in 1915 and numerous expansions and modernizations have been carried on in the church plant since. Four pastors have served in the direction of the church since its founding. The Rev. John T. Lynch, the first pastor, served until his death in 1924 and Monsignor Jeremiah T. Duggan was pastor from then until 1944. The present pastor is the Rev. Thomas B. McGarry.

St. Stanislaus' Roman Catholic Church, the first Polish Catholic church in Connecticut, has grown and prospered in serving Meriden families of Polish descent. In 1880 there were only ten of these, who began meeting in the basement of St. Rose Church. By 1892 they had become a separate congregation, meeting in



their own wooden church building which had been completed on the corner of Jefferson Street.

In 1906 the Rev. John L. Ceppa began his duties at St. Stanislaus', duties which were to continue through the growing years of the new church and which ended only with his death in 1948. The present church building, a brick edifice of Gothic design, on an eminence at the corner of Pleasant and Olive Streets, was dedicated in 1908. In 1915 the new parochial school building was completed. During Father Ceppa's long pastorate, improvements and enlargements totaling in cost more than half a million dollars were made and paid for. Among them were the convent and St. Stanislaus Community Center, which includes an auditorium with a gallery accommodating 1,200 persons. Ceppa Field, sold to the city in 1941, was used for some years by the church as a playground and athletic field. Father Ceppa was elevated to the Monsignori in 1943. The Rev. Stanislaus F. Nalewajk, who began his pastorate in 1948, is at present in charge of the parish. Current plans call for a new convent of 30 rooms to be begun this year. Further additions to the parochial school are also being planned.

First Church of Christ Scientist of Meriden was organized in 1899. Services were held in a succession of rented halls as the membership and attendance grew. In 1922 the first meeting was held in the present brick edifice at Bradley Park.

The Meriden church serves the surrounding area including Wallingford, Southington, and Cheshire. It maintains a reading room, serving members and the public, at 37 East Main Street. Mrs. Edith Lipke Ulisney is president of the organization, Mr. Howard B. Preble serves as First Reader, and Mrs. Elizabeth Sembler is Second Reader.

In 1911 Sts. Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church was established, under the pastorate of the Very Reverend Seraphim Oblivantseff and the church building on Bunker Avenue was completed the following year. Under the direction of the Very Reverend Alexander Pogrebniak, who officiated at the church between 1933 and 1948, a parish and community building was erected in 1939.

July of 1955 saw ground broken for a new church building which is currently under construction. Plans call for completion and dedication in July of this year. The Rev. John Mason is the current pastor.

## MERIDEN CHURCHES

Meetings which led to the founding of the first Italian Baptist Church were begun in the year 1909 when the minister of the First Baptist Church held meetings for the people in the Springdale Avenue area, bringing with him Sunday School teachers from his own and from the Main Street Baptist Church. The organization continued meeting in Columbus Hall under the leadership of its first pastor, the Rev. Rolando Giuffrida, until the present building was completed in 1912.

Recent improvements to church property include the purchase of a parsonage in 1945 and the installation of an organ and chimes in 1946 as a war memorial. In 1954 the men of the church redecorated and modernized the kitchen and Sunday School rooms. The Rev. Samuel Binch is the present pastor.

St. Nicholas Parish serves the spiritual needs of the Byzantine Rite Catholics of Meriden. The parish was organized in 1914 and land was purchased for the church site in the same year. Until the church building was completed the members of the parish worshipped at special services organized for them at St. Joseph's Church.

Ground was broken for the new church in 1919, and the official dedication of the building took place in 1921, during the pastorate of Father Vladimer Michalich, the first resident pastor. The acquisition of a rectory in 1923 and recent additions and improvements to the church property mark its growth. The present pastor is the Rev. Peter P. Kichinko, who assumed his duties in August, 1955.

Mt. Hebron Baptist Church is a Negro congregation organized in 1945. It is currently meeting in a building at 21 Veteran Street but plans are under way for the construction of a regular church building. The Rev. F. H. Hicks who has officiated since 1951 is the third pastor of the church.

Jehovah's Witnesses, established for some years at Kingdom Hall on Grove Street, have recently completed a substantial brick meeting house on Coe Avenue, erected largely through labor supplied by members of the congregation. Meriden's Seventh Day Adventists hold regular weekly services at 32 Crown Street. The Salvation Army offers regular religious services as part of its program.



## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

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### Meriden Schools; 1860-1956

ALTHOUGH THE history of Meriden schools begins almost with the first establishment of a settlement in this area, free public schools as we know them did not come into being until 1863. During the 18th century the parish acted in its annual meetings in the capacity of a town meeting, appointing school committees, mapping out school districts, and laying taxes for the support of the schools.

In December of 1773, for example, it was voted "to lay a Rate of one farthing upon the pound for ye use of schools and each quarter or school to have their proportion of said money according to ye list of each quarter." "Ye Society Committee" voted in 1776 to "call in ye loan & excise money that belongs to ye Parish for the use of schools next March & let it out with good security . . . . . to be paid yearly to said committee for use of schools only. . . ."

The parish was divided into seven school districts in 1791, presumably with the purpose of establishing seven separate school-houses. These were designated as southeast, east, northeast, northwest, west, southwest, and center. As the town grew these districts were subdivided until in the mid-nineteenth century a total of thirteen was recorded.

During the years before 1863 Meriden's schools were public but they were not free. The responsibility for maintaining and financing each school fell to the district in which it was located, with little help or supervision from the town. Most of the cost seems to have been made up by tuition charged on a per pupil basis although the practice of making payment in kind, from firewood for the schoolhouse stove to board and lodging for the teacher, probably took the place of a cash payment in many instances.

In 1863 the town voted that "all the public schools of the town shall be free, and the expense of said schools, heretofore defrayed from the avails of rate bills, shall be paid by the town." It was also voted to increase the educational tax from three tenths to one

and one twentieth of a mill on the dollar so as to cover all the expenses of the several districts.

This modified district plan which was to remain in force for nearly a quarter of a century was devised to keep the primary responsibility and control of the schools directly in the hands of the surrounding neighborhood, reserving certain important powers and checks to the town and the state. Under it the voters of each district elected each year a committee of one or more men to hire teachers and to run the schools. The voters of the town at large elected a Board of School Visitors to approve teacher hiring, to examine choice of textbooks, and to oversee the condition of the schoolhouses.

The Board of Visitors and the town selectmen acted as a joint board of finance for the schools and recommended an appropriation by the town sufficient to provide each district with funds for ordinary running expenses, including teachers' salaries, payment for janitors, and fuel. Building and maintenance of the schoolhouses was left in the hands of the districts, which set up organizations for this purpose staffed with collectors, treasurers, and auditors.

Most of the duties of the Board of Visitors were carried out by the man designated Acting Visitor. This official was paid a small salary and his duties resembled in a limited area those of a modern school superintendent. He visited the schools, made recommendations to the district committees, and evaluated the teachers and their work.

Control of the purse-strings was the power which the Acting School Visitor and, through him, the Board could invoke to improve district school conditions if it was deemed necessary. However, withholding town tax money from the districts was a drastic move, bound to stir up a storm, and Visitors only used it as a last resort, after important recommendations had been repeatedly and flagrantly ignored.

Such a situation arose over the schoolhouse in the Farms district, which Visitors repeatedly criticized and condemned over a period of years. Finally, in May of 1879, the district committee was officially notified that "no further appropriations of school money would be made until the accommodations were made satisfactory." By September a new building had been erected by the citizens of the district and was ready for use.



The official Visitors' Report of 1864-65 draws a clear profile of the Meriden school system two years after the town assumed control of its finances and made schooling free to all children. The experiment was hailed by the Visitors as an outstanding success. Through the new system a fairer distribution of the economic burden was attained. Already increased attendance was evident.

Children in Meriden between the ages of four and sixteen numbered 1,675, an increase of 137 from the previous year. An Academy and four private schools enrolled 250 of these children. During the year, 1,128 students were registered in the public schools. The winter term served 968 children, with an average attendance of 757. In the summer term 948 were enrolled, with an average attendance of 751. Three male and 21 female teachers were employed.

Reading was the most-studied subject in the curriculum, with a total of 1,112 students applying themselves to it during the two sessions. Arithmetic came next, with geography a trailing third. Grammar attracted only 111 students. History enrolled 77 students, while physiology and philosophy enrollment hovered around 25. Fifteen students studied Latin, eight wrestled with algebra, and one was learning bookkeeping.

Special praise was given to the "Grand Spelling Match" which was held at the Town Hall on two successive evenings. The programs of vocal music in several of the schools, daily reading of the Bible in class, and "light gymnastics" were also commended. It is worth remarking, for the sake of those who consider today's youth uniquely ungovernable, that the need for "firm government" is stressed as an ideal not always achieved in the schools of the 1860's. "We have found that those schools where teachers kept a daily report of deportment appeared the best," observed the Visitors.

In assessing the work of each individual teacher, the report is both specific and succinct. Of one unfortunate teacher in the intermediate department of the Corner School it is recorded for posterity that "though a Normal School scholar and an estimable lady, (she) did not seem to restore the interest and bring the school up to a desirable standard."

School finances as managed by the Visitors in the report are a model of tidiness and exactitude. Receipts from the state school

fund of \$1,892.90 plus \$399.13 from the Town Deposit fund and \$4,500.95 from the educational tax add up to \$6,792.98. Expenditures of \$5,761.25 for teachers' salaries plus \$1,031.73 for fuel and other expenses total in expenditures \$6,792.98.

A legacy from even more halcyon days is the mention of the Town Deposit fund. This is a memorial of the country's first venture into federal aid to education, originating in 1836. In this year our thrifty forefathers were faced with an overflow in the United States treasury to the amount of 28 million dollars. This money Congress lent to the states to be put out at interest. Connecticut divided her share, \$763,661, among the towns, creating the Town Deposit fund, the proceeds of which should be "forever" devoted to school purposes.

The rising population of the state's school children plus a falling interest rate have cut this fund so that it is today only a token of a frugal past. But back a century ago it was not to be scorned. It made a sizable part of the amount of money available for each potential pupil of the population which was \$4.05. The amount actually spent, on a per-pupil registered basis, for a student's education in Meriden was \$6.00.

Already, with the free school system only two years old, the shape of schools to come casts its shadow over the 1864-65 report. The Corner School, in the present downtown area at Church and Colony Streets, held one-third of all the pupils in Meriden and was growing rapidly. A new building would soon be needed. The pressing demand for a central high school was obvious. A move to do away with the districts and to give the entire school management to the town had been voted down, as it would be repeatedly in the next 25 years, but its merits were expounded by the Visitors. The report closes on a note still familiar to us in 1956: "The facilities for education are not commensurate with the increase of population in the town."

During the decade from 1860 to 1870 the population of Meriden spurted from 7,426 to 10,571. Increased school attendance in the years following 1863 was marked. In that year 57 per cent of the children of school age were registered in the schools, and among these the attendance averaged 66 per cent. The Connecticut compulsory education law passed in the 1870's required three months at least of education each year for all children between



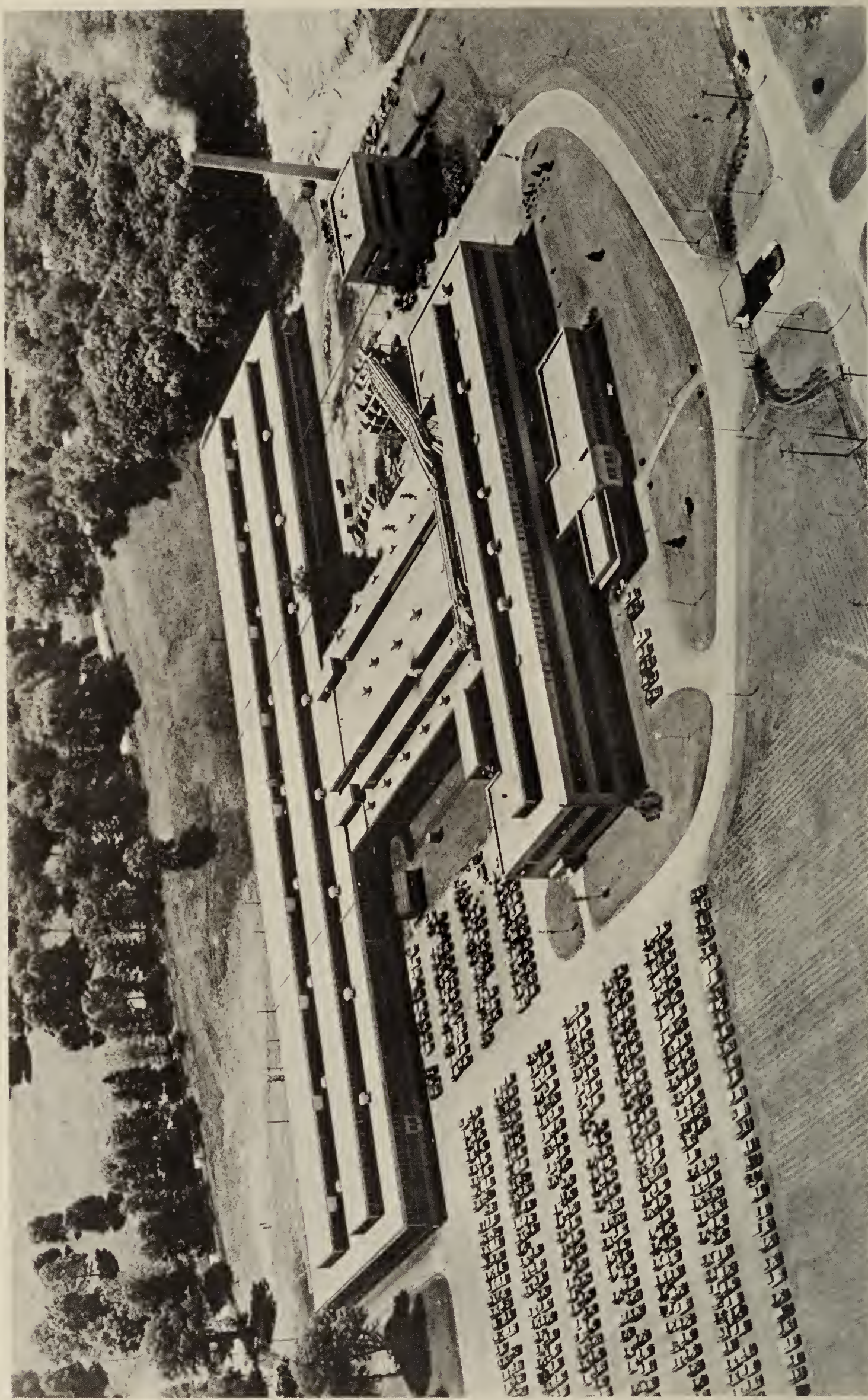


President Franklin D. Roosevelt in Meriden — October, 1936  
Left to right in car: Meriden Senator Francis T. Maloney, President Roosevelt, Mrs. Roosevelt, Gov. Wilbur Cross



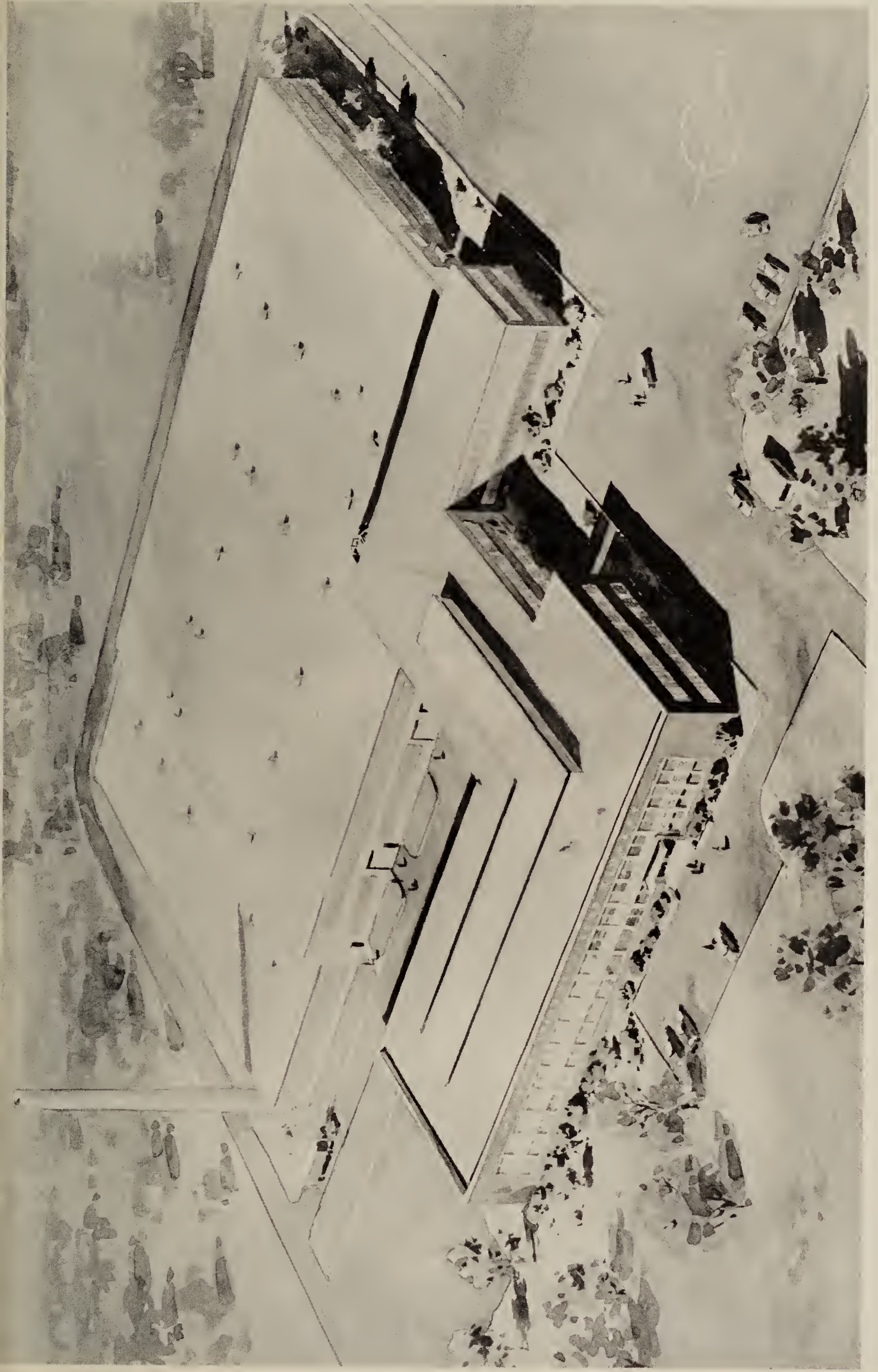
President Theodore Roosevelt visits Meriden in 1903





International Silver Company Factories A and J, Wallingford





International Silver Company  
Administration Building and Factory under construction on South Broad Street



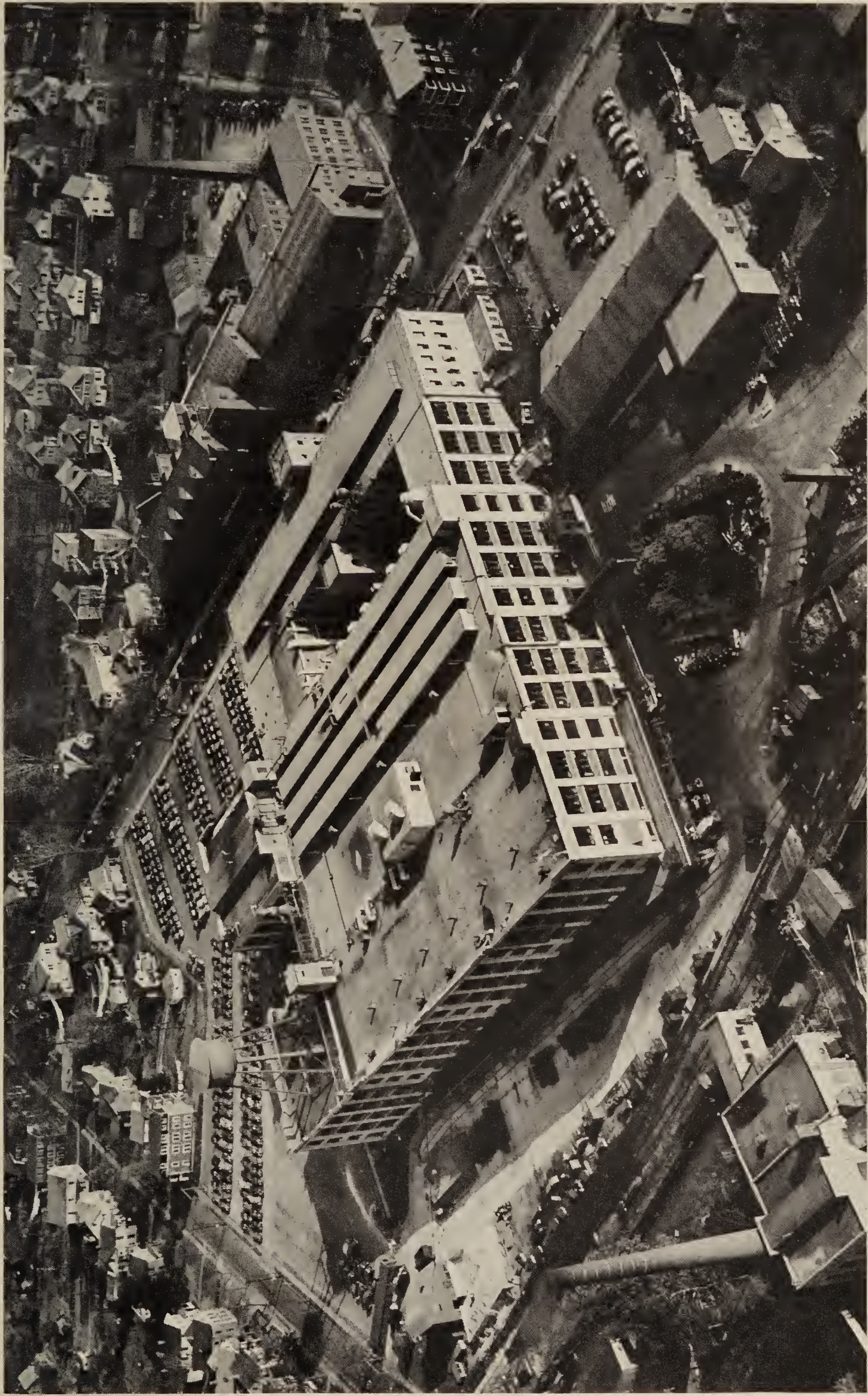


The Charles Parker Company



The Miller Company





New Departure Division of General Motors, Meriden





The Napier Company



Cuno Engineering Corporation





The Lane Construction Corporation

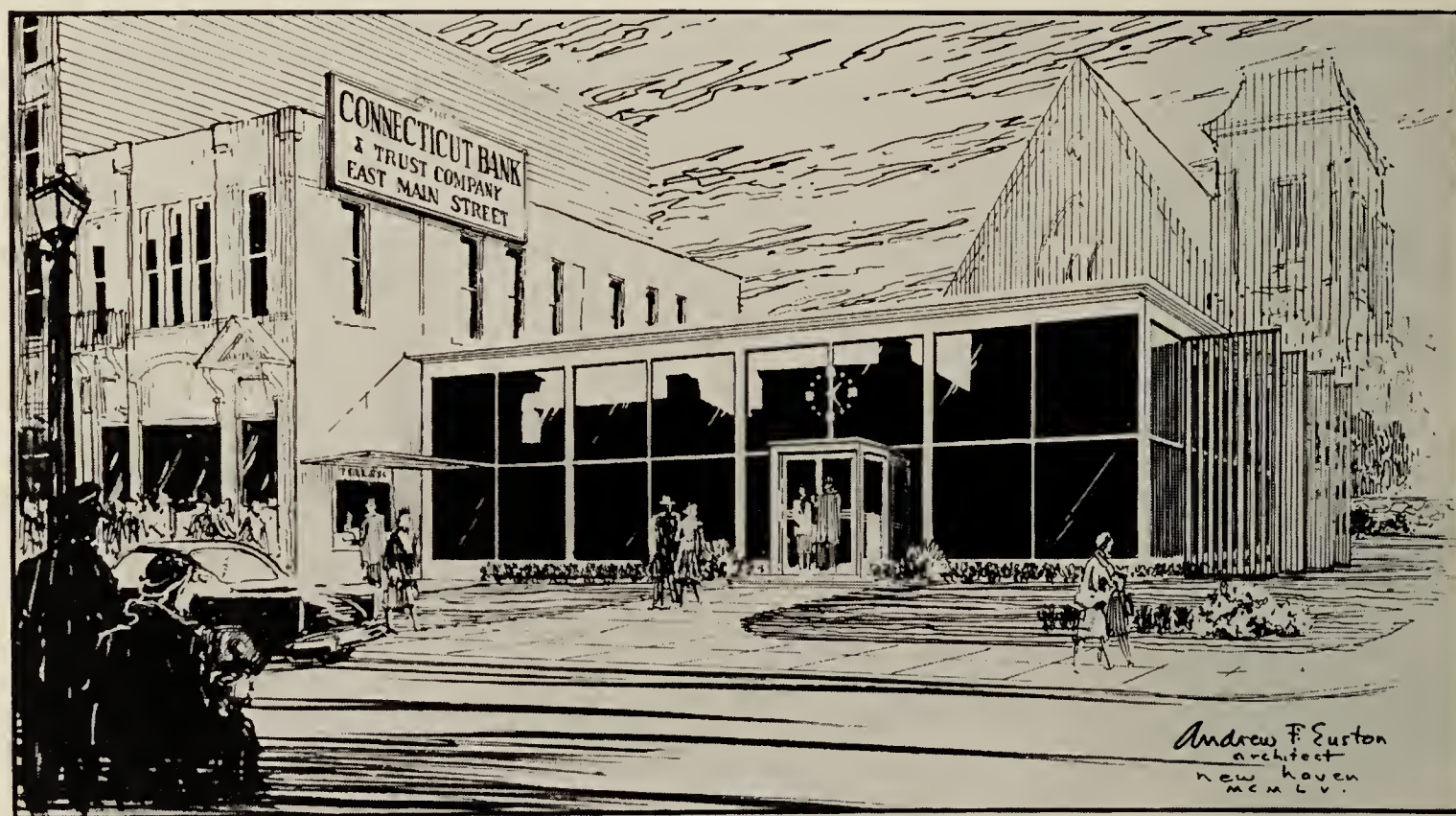


The Connecticut Telephone & Electric Corporation





Meriden Permanent Savings & Loan Association Addition



Addition to East Main Branch, Connecticut Bank & Trust Company



eight and fourteen. In 1874 attendance of those registered in the Meriden schools rose to 83½ per cent.

The need for new school buildings was immediate and acute. Happily, a healthy spirit of rivalry sprang up among the districts, which vied with each other in their efforts to build bigger and better schools. During the 1870's came the first real departure from the little-red-schoolhouse concept of buildings and teaching. In the Center and Corner districts were built brick structures which by dint of counting the half-submerged basements and the gabled attic rooms could be labeled as containing four stories. Two-story buildings were erected in the West and Hanover districts. Prattsville built the North Broad Street School, an eight-room building described as a "model."

In 1879-80 the town distributed to the district treasurers for school operation \$29,647.23. The districts raised \$11,877.17 by taxes and \$2,053 by loans, less than half what the town appropriated.

The early 1880's saw another wave of population increase and the erection of more substantial two-story brick buildings to meet it. The South Broad Street School and the Samuel Huntington School on King Street belong to this period.

Several private schools flourished in the early and mid 1800's. The Meriden Academical Association in 1848 sold shares for the purchase and reconditioning of the old Baptist Church on the northeast corner of Broad Street, and for many years it served as a private school and a cultural center. The basement was rented for business purposes and the hall for traveling shows such as "Tom Thumb" and the "Indian Exhibition" in 1849. It was much in demand for meetings of civic and fraternal groups and religious and political meetings.

The stockholders never received any dividends from their investment and frequently collections had to be taken at stockholders' meetings to meet small deficits. The school was run with no attempt to make money; the rent charged to the teacher was sometimes as high as \$25 a quarter. The teacher ran the school independently, with what books and equipment he happened to own, and made his living by charging tuition. It was closed in 1869 when the newly built Center School proved more attractive to students in the area.

From 1847 to 1853 the Meriden Institute acquired a high

reputation in secondary school training. It was located on the north corner of Church Street, fronting Colony Street. The building was later bought by the district to house the Corner School and the Institute removed to King Street, where it operated for some years.

In 1869 four private elementary schools were reported in operation. The popularity of the private schools diminished as public school buildings and educational techniques were improved during the next two decades. A private school conducted by Mrs. A. S. Booth enjoyed continued popularity and in 1894 had 111 pupils.

From 1879 till 1903 the German-American School Association taught children of German descent in a private institution designed to keep them familiar with the German language. The school was housed in a building on Liberty Street. Enrollment of pupils in the German-American school ran between 60 and 100 pupils.

As early as 1864, the second year in which a free town school system was in operation, the need for a central high school was pointed out by the Visitors. Some secondary school work was offered in most of the district schools but with one room and one teacher, often poorly trained, serving all the children it must have taken an exceptionally gifted and determined student to profit by advanced studies. Prior to this time the privately run Meriden Institute served the needs of most of Meriden's secondary school students.

The Corner District School, installed in the old Meriden Institute building on the corner of Church and Colony Streets, had by 1864 an enrollment of 275 pupils and three teachers and was the largest in the town. It was reported that this was the only thoroughly graded school in the town which "receives children in the elements and takes them through the successive stages of the common and higher English branches and also enables them to avail themselves of the facilities of a classical education."

This building burned and was replaced in 1868 by a large brick structure erected on what is now the municipal parking lot. At this time a regular high school department was organized in it and by 1880 pupils from other districts were flocking here for their secondary school education. High School Avenue owes its name to Meriden's recognition of the Corner School's training.



A senior department was also organized at the South Center School and served more advanced students from other districts.

The fight for a Meriden High School was a long and stubborn one. Finally in April, 1881, the town skirted the controversial title by voting \$3,000 with which to start a "Central school" and the second floor of the German-American school on Liberty Street was leased for classes. Henry S. Pratt was the first principal. Applicants had to pass an examination for admission. Of the 73 applicants, 54 passed and 51 actually entered the school in September.

A special committee of five was elected yearly by the town at large to administer the affairs of the High School as long as the school district plan remained in force. High school subjects were discontinued in all district schools. It is worth noting that Albert B. Mather, who began his teaching career in the Corner School in 1869 and was largely responsible for the success of its high school department, received recognition of his ability when, a few years after this, he was appointed Meriden's second superintendent of schools.

In 1882 the name "Meriden High School" was formally bestowed on the school, which graduated its first class of 13 members in 1883. The annual town meeting of that year voted to appropriate \$50,000 to procure a site and erect a high school building. Later the sum was raised to \$80,000. The High School on the corner of Catlin and Liberty Streets was formally opened in 1885 although its interior was not completely finished till 1890 when the number of students justified the use of all the rooms.

Meriden citizens took great pride in this first High School. The *Century of Meriden* in 1906 describes it as "This beautiful and imposing structure (into which) were incorporated the best ideas of beauty and utility of design, and the best materials and workmanship." Numerous gifts, large and small, from private citizens are recorded. Especially praised was its library which was reputed to be one of the best in the state.

The early 1890's saw another increase in population with more school building to meet it. This is the period of the school with the central octagonal corridor with rooms opening from it and enclosed pupils' wardrobes. The old John Barry School, still in use on Columbia Street, is the surviving example of this type.

In 1896 another major reform, long and stubbornly fought for,

was finally accomplished. Since the beginnings of free schools on the district system, Visitors and education officials had advocated the abandonment of the districts and the consolidation of all schools under the town. "Our schools should be equal as well as free or we shall lose the benefits of experience and progress," was the way the Visitors put it in 1863. The Visitors made a similar recommendation which was again turned down in 1869. Echoes of the battle can be detected in the reports of 1875 and 1877.

Only five votes provided the margin by which the change was finally authorized in 1896. Under the new terms the town assumed the property and indebtedness of the districts and became responsible for all school costs. A committee of twelve men was designated to handle all school business and act as School Board, with an executive officer with the title of superintendent chosen to administer school affairs.

At the time of consolidation the town school committee reported the total value of all school property as being \$234,987.42 though the combined reports of the district committees would have put it as \$413,548. The indebtedness of the districts assumed by the town was \$61,010.45, with ready assets listed at \$2,488.91.

Some money had long been received from the state for school purposes. The beginning of state aid can be traced to the sale of Western Reserve lands in Ohio which yielded Connecticut more than two million dollars. This was invested for the benefit of the schools and was portioned out on a per capita child basis. In 1871 it provided \$1.20 per scholar. In 1891, with more children in the schools, and a lower interest rate, it was 75 cents. Total state aid in that year, appropriated from the civil list, was \$1.50 per scholar. In 1905 state aid had risen to \$2.25 per child.

Evening school classes are first mentioned in 1872, when 127 pupils were registered. In 1874-75 the selectmen refused the use of rooms for class use and the project was given up. Edward C. Wheatley conducted a school for the West district in 1882-83 without any assistance from the town.

State aid for evening schools was forthcoming in 1886 and there ensued a boom in enrollment. Four hundred ninety-eight pupils were registered and the average attendance per night was 249. This was more than double the enrollment in Hartford and one third again that of New Haven. The town contributed liberally



in financial support. Men teachers received \$2.50 per evening and women \$1.50. The next year attendance dropped to an average of 102 per session and the year after that to 45. The school was discontinued the following year.

In 1893 the state passed a law which required towns of 10,000 or more to maintain evening schools and appropriated \$3.00 per average pupil membership on a 100-night basis for their support. The city had evidently lost its enthusiasm for evening schools because a threat of mandamus was required before one was opened. It was conducted by Mrs. Adele S. Booth with the help of scholars from her own private school, from the High School, and even from the Central Grammar School, and in its attempts to find quarters it led a roaming existence. Its cost to the city was only \$300 a year.

Use of the High School was authorized in 1905 and teachers from the day school were appointed. This support was reflected in the enrollment which reached 338, representing 29 nationalities.

In 1912 the evening school was active with an enrollment of 491. The wave of immigration was reflected by the number of recent arrivals eager to learn the language and the ways of their new home. One hundred thirteen students were recorded in the non-English speaking classes and 131 in the non-English reading and writing. Thirty-five of the students had their origins in Germany, there were 25 from Sweden, 36 from Russia, 61 from Poland, 64 from Italy, and 64 from Austria.

In 1905 when school superintendent William P. Kelly reviewed the history of the schools for the *Century of Meriden*, the town owned 18 school buildings, nine of which were of brick. Ten had eight rooms or more, one had six rooms, four had four rooms, and three one-room schools were still in operation in the outlying districts. The total income to be expended for this year was \$115,980, which included a special appropriation of \$10,000 which was to furnish free textbooks to the pupils for the first time.

The first drawing supervisor had been appointed in 1896 and singing had been introduced under a supervisor in 1898. The first kindergarten was established at the Franklin Street School in 1903. Willis J. Prouty has been principal of the High School, where he had previously served as a math instructor, since 1899.

Average attendance at the High School climbed between 1897 and 1905-06 from 241 to 258. The entering class in 1897 numbered

110, with 31 continuing to graduation and ten of that number continuing their education at college or some other institution after they left high school. In 1905-06 the size of the entering class shrank to 99, but the number graduating rose to 38, and 14 continued their post-high-school education.

School finances, according to Mr. Kelly, were complex. "The first selectman pays all the bills from the appropriation as fast as they are approved by the school committee, but turns over the money for salaries in a lump sum each month to the clerk of the school committee, who attends to paying the employees, who are on salary.

"The treasurer of the school committee receives the library grant from the state of \$270 a year and a like amount of town funds from the first selectman. These are increased by a few tuition fees and other small sums. His receipts for 1904-05 were \$848.58 and his expenditures for books and apparatus were \$776.74.

"The principal of the High School collects tuition from non-residents, and with it buys books for the High School library.

"Thus, at the present time, four different persons receive, disburse, and account for the money used by the schools."

A \$150,000 bond issue was authorized in 1905 for new school construction and for additions and modernizations of existing buildings. West Grammar School, still in use as Lincoln Junior High, is today's memorial to that building program.

By 1911 the public school enrollment was 4,433. The cost of transporting public school pupils was listed as: wagons, \$750, electric cars, \$359.

Meriden dentists volunteered their time and services in this year to examine all children's teeth, classifying 1,648 mouths as "bad," in need of immediate attention. The presence of 314 "exposed nerves" and 69 "ulcers" was discovered.

The census revealed that 714 children, 15 per cent of the school enrollment, were working instead of attending school. By 1915 this figure had been reduced by 65 per cent.

In 1907-08 the annual school cost per child was \$38.60. By 1914 it had climbed to \$42.35 and in 1916 it was \$50.48. It was \$89.64 in 1920, 112 per cent over the 1914 figure.

After a quarter of a century of operation the Meriden High School was bulging at the seams. A poem by a member of the



class of 1911 described the crisis:

“Our school is overcrowded quite  
And something must be done  
For being packed in like sardines  
I tell you isn't fun.

The classes in geometry  
Are hooked upon the walls;  
And Cicero and Caesar  
Are murdered in the halls.

Now won't the citizens, humane,  
Please vote us a new school!  
And if they will we promise that  
We'll try to keep each rule.”

This moving plea was finally answered when a site was secured near the corner of Pleasant Street, and the opening of the present High School building was solemnized in 1913.

The financial statement for 1917 shows a total of \$209,982 spent, and a budget of \$251,025 was requested for the year 1917-18. The average size of classes at this time was 34, with an 18-pupil average at the High School. A marked improvement in the drop-out rate in the upper grades was evident over a ten-year period.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century a steady rise in teachers' salaries is evident, paralleling the rise in the cost and standard of living. In 1906 the beginning salary for teachers was \$400, with a \$40 per year increase to a top of \$560 or \$600 dependent on the taking of some additional education courses. By 1908, \$480 was set as the minimum and \$720 the maximum for grade school teachers. Women who taught at the High School could look to a top of \$950 while men could qualify for posts paying as high as \$1,600.

In 1915 the maximum was \$760 in the grades with a top of \$800 set for the eighth grade. Women principals found their salaries pegged at \$1,000. The 1917 schedule called for a \$580 starting salary which ran to a top of \$900 for eighth grade teachers. Salaries for women teachers in the High School were between \$750 and \$1,200 with the maximum for men at \$1,700. Women who were heads of departments were paid \$1,350 and men received \$1,850. Forty-two per cent of the budget increases

due to teacher salaries occurred between 1911 and 1917.

Meriden ranked fifth among 67 cities in the East of comparable size in 1920 in regards to median salary, with a minimum of \$1,000 and a maximum for men teaching in the High School of \$2,500.

Open-air classes were begun in 1918 in part of the old Church Street School to serve pupils with a history of personal or family tuberculosis and those who were underweight and in poor physical condition. They were a popular educational feature of the times. The cost to the city in that year was \$7,292.18. In 1920, 53 children were registered in the open-air classes.

The Meriden Trade School opened its doors in September, 1918. Designed to meet the needs of the young men of Meriden and surrounding communities for training in the mechanical arts, it was organized by agreement with the State Board of Education which furnished equipment and materials and paid the teachers. Meriden provided and maintained the building, furnished the heat, light, and power, and paid half the janitors' fees.

Located in a factory building on the east end of Charles Street which was rented by the city, the school offered machine work, carpentry, electrical work, and drafting. Later in the year, courses in auto mechanics and pattern making were made available.

The regular course, designed to be completed in two years, consisted of six hours of shop work and two of academic a day. A three-year cooperative course with the High School made it possible to attend that building in the mornings, complete the requirements for training in a trade in the afternoons, and receive a diploma from both institutions. Other schedules were possible through arrangements with employers.

The School Board report for 1920 features a picture of a complete six-room house built by Trade School boys under the supervision of their instructors. One hundred forty-five students were registered in the day courses that year and 150 in the evening. The need for a new, more adequate building was already being pointed out.

Since the consolidation of the school districts under the town, school policy had been directed by a board composed of 12 members, half of whom were appointed by each political party. The size of the group as well as its obvious political allegiances and the fundamental split which this caused was a continuing handicap to effective operation. The need had long been evident



for a smaller elective school board which would be answerable directly to the voters and which would be in a position to make decisions and to act with responsibility.

In 1921 Meriden's new city charter was approved by the Legislature and embodied in it was the provision for a Board of Education consisting of five members elected by the voters to serve on a staggered schedule, each holding office for six years. The new school board was voted into existence with the ratification of the charter and at the same time the last traces of the old school district system were obliterated.

As the Board was set up then and continues to operate, it is responsible for planning school policy which is executed by the superintendent. The Board hires all teachers and other personnel, accepting recommendations from the superintendent and from other administrators. It is also responsible for maintenance of buildings and their use, and for insurance. It decides on what courses are to be offered or dropped.

The yearly school budget is constructed by the Board and it approves all bills which the school system incurs. However, the Board of Apportionment and Taxation must approve the budget, and can and has cut it when it deems fit. State aid for Meriden schools goes into the general city treasury, not directly into a separate category of school funds.

The Board of Education meets twice a month, sometimes oftener, and serves without pay. Currently its members are also serving on the School Building Committee. Although candidates for the Board of Education run for election on the tickets of the two major parties, the Board has achieved a reputation for acting nonpolitically and most members tend to forget party labels in dealing with school problems. In this attitude they are carrying on the tradition of the many Meriden citizens who over the last century and a half have labored selflessly and intelligently, without pay, for the betterment of their community and its schools.

Hint of a controversy which is still legally unsettled in Connecticut and which probably will always continue to some degree came in April of 1922. Although the Board of Education is and has always been an organ of the State Department of Education and is required by law to carry out the state's statutes on educational matters, it is the province of the city government to provide

the money by which this is accomplished. The conflict arises when the Board of Education votes a policy which requires funds to implement and the Board of Apportionment and Taxation refuses to appropriate these funds.

State Education Commissioner Meredith pointed out to the Board at that time that school committees are state agents bound to carry out the intent of the state statutes regardless of financial support. He advised the Board that if the town refuses to give the money they, the Board, may "incur debt and if necessary take the matter into the courts." The argument this time, as on other occasions, was over the matter of a raise in teachers' salaries.

Junior ROTC on a compulsory basis for the High School was instituted in 1921 at the request of the War Department. Carried on till 1922, it was discontinued because of overcrowding and lack of facilities.

With the High School on half sessions, and the use of obsolete and inadequate buildings, including the Church Street School, stirring criticism, another major building program was planned. At its beginning the city was at 55 per cent of its debt limit.

Names of famous historical personages were given to the schools in 1923, after some years of discussion. Contests were run among the school children who wrote essays advancing the causes of their favorite Revolutionary War heroes. Of the names chosen, only the High School's of "George Washington" refused to stick. Diplomas were issued under the title to the graduating classes of 1924 and 1925 but "Meriden High School" was too deeply ingrained in the city's tradition, and in 1926 it reasserted itself.

Also dropped was the name "Robert Morris" for the South Meriden school. When the old building burned in 1932 the new one which replaced it was christened "Hanover" by common consent. The Nathan Hale School on Lewis Avenue was sold to Mount Carmel Church in 1942 and not until the new school on Baldwin Avenue was built did this popular and appropriate hero again possess a memorial.

By 1925 the outlines of the Meriden school system as it is today had emerged. Jefferson Junior High School was built. The old West Grammar School was enlarged with the addition of a wing containing an auditorium-gymnasium and room for shop work, and was renamed Lincoln Junior High. These two schools took all seventh, eighth, and ninth grade pupils in the city except those



in South Meriden, who continued to attend the local school for seventh and eighth grades until 1934. Jonathan Trumbull School opened, the first elementary school to have a permanent stage, and took over the pupils from North Broad and Franklin Street Schools which were then closed.

Adoption of the junior high school system was a sign of the changing philosophy of education. By 1921 the first experiments in the approach to teaching which has become known as "progressive" were stirring the city to controversy. A policy was introduced whereby pupils were promoted not only on the basis of work completed in each grade but of ability to do more advanced work as shown by tests. A number of students whose test work ranked high were jumped a grade or half a grade. High-ranking students in the eighth grade were given ninth grade work to do and allowed to enter high school as sophomores.

Another new idea was the introduction on an experimental basis by School Superintendent David Gibbs of the "platoon" system. This scheme divided the children of the lower grades into two equal groups, one of which studied academic subjects while the other used the gym, attended assemblies, or engaged in singing or drawing. It was designed to increase the capacity of school facilities. At the High School an experiment was in progress by which the students were divided into fast, medium, and slow classes so that each group could progress to best advantage.

The junior high schools reflected the new philosophy of education which shifted the emphasis away from total concentration on academic subjects and undertook to provide a general cultural and citizenship background along with vocational training for the majority of young people who would not go to college. By evolving a program which would better meet the needs of early adolescents, educators hoped to combat the high drop-out rate.

Dr. Gibbs resigned in 1926 while the controversy over his educational innovations was still raging. He was succeeded by C. C. Thompson. By 1927 there were 5,814 pupils enrolled in the public schools, reflecting the high birth rate of the World War I years, and again the cry was raised for new buildings to relieve overcrowding. The Roger Sherman School, opened in 1929, was built on Liberty Street, and the John Barry Annex, now the main building, went up on Columbia Street. In 1927 the Church Street

School was finally closed and the land on which it stood returned to the city.

Until now school health had been largely the province of the Child Welfare League, a public service organization supported by public contributions. In 1924 this organization reported that an examination of all high school girls had been completed. High school boys were examined the next year and an inordinate number were found to be afflicted with flat feet. It was suggested that the wearing of sneakers might cause this.

The League reported in 1928 that because of lack of funds it would be unable to carry on its work and the Board of Education appropriated \$11,792 for this purpose. It also accepted a dental clinic outfit which had formerly been the property of the League and the next year a dental hygienist was engaged.

The year 1930 marked the passing of one of childhood's most cherished privileges. The system of no-school signals was dropped and it became the responsibility of the parents to determine when the weather was too bad to allow children to attend school.

The High School had the doubtful distinction in 1931 of offering the shortest school day of any high school in the state. An addition was once more discussed but because of the depression, the Board decided instead to house the overflow of students in the old Central Elementary School.

On June 9 the State Trade School moved into its new building on Miller Street when it was accepted by the state. It was rechristened the Wilcox Technical School.

Nicholas Moseley took over the duties of superintendent in 1932. In spite of a continued climb in enrollment the school budget was cut by \$100,000 to \$538,973, mostly by reducing teachers' salaries.

September of 1934 found a total enrollment in public and parochial schools of 8,568. It was voted to close two old schools in the outlying districts, one, the city's oldest, the Southeast School on Paddock Avenue which had been built in 1800. In a move to consolidate elementary schools in the face of dropping enrollment in the lower grades, the Willow Street School was closed and sold to the Polish Knights of the Blessed Virgin. The High School was put on half sessions. There was continued talk of a need for new high school facilities and of an addition to the Trade School, but no action was taken.



Controversy over "progressive" versus old-fashioned educational methods flared again in the mid 30's. It was pointed out that modern teacher training stressed the newer methods which were being reflected in public school teaching. In 1938 Mr. Moseley resigned, to be replaced by Raymond N. Brown. Under Mr. Brown a return to the more traditional ways of teaching was encouraged.

Evening school enrollments climbed rapidly during the depression years. Many recent high school graduates were among the 784 registered in 1933. The enthusiasm and enterprise which characterized Meriden's program were highly praised by the state authorities. The high point was in 1934 with a registration of 947. In 1935, 600 were registered, 150 of them in the non-English classes. The cost to the city per pupil per evening was less than ten cents. The Trade School addition was completed in 1937.

After 75 years of operation, the North Colony Street School was closed in 1940 because of dropping enrollment in the area and was sold to the International Silver Company. Teacher salaries, which had been cut during the depression, were on their way up again, running from a starting rate of \$1,251.25 to a top for executive positions of \$5,000. Most fell within the \$1,500 to \$2,500 range. In 1943, the low birth rate of the depression years was reflected in an enrollment of 4,494.

The Board of Education was praised in 1946 for providing special refresher courses in the summer for returning veterans. This program was discontinued in 1947 when the need for it passed. Average cost per school child at this time was \$177.36 per year compared with a state average of \$161.08. The rule barring married teachers from employment was questioned for the first time, and was destined soon to be abandoned as the growing teacher shortage made it impractical. The maximum in this year for teacher salaries below the administrative and supervisory level was set at \$2,800 to \$3,900 depending on training and length of service.

By 1947 the increased birth rate of the war years began to be reflected in school enrollments and it was obvious that a major school building program would be necessary. No major building had been undertaken since 1926. The city appropriated \$35,000 in 1948 to recondition the old High School building at the corner of Liberty and Catlin Streets, for use as an Annex. The Welfare

Department was moved out, making the Annex available for classes in commercial subjects and the High School was put on single session again.

The elementary school building program got under way in 1948 with a half million dollar bonding issue for the Roger Sherman Annex. Six classrooms, an auditorium-gymnasium, a lunch room with kitchen facilities, lavatories, and additional office space were provided. Similar educational facilities were included in the new 12-room Israel Putnam School on Parker Avenue and the 16-room Benjamin Franklin School. A \$1,200,000 bond issue financed these buildings which were opened in 1951.

Badly needed expansion of the Hanover School was help up in 1951 when bonding authorities objected to the restrictive clause in the city charter barring capital improvements in the outer tax district. The necessary change in the charter was ratified and the Hanover addition opened its doors in 1954. An addition to the John Barry School of 12 rooms and additional facilities was completed in 1953, and four rooms were added to Jonathan Trumbull.

The continued growth of school population made necessary the construction in 1955 of a four-room addition to the Parker Avenue Israel Putnam School and the construction of the new Nathan Hale School on Baldwin Avenue. No bonding was necessary for the Israel Putnam addition which was paid for out of current revenue. The Nathan Hale School has 16 classrooms but its extra-classroom facilities, which are not the equal of those in other newly constructed schools, reflect an attempt by the city to economize in the face of continued demand for expansion. A bond issue of \$600,000 was issued for construction of this school.

The Roger Sherman addition to the Annex, opened in 1949, cost \$506,256, with state aid to the extent of \$162,153 returnable over a 17-year period. It has 12 rooms.

Benjamin Franklin School, opened in 1951, contains 17 rooms and cost \$542,982, with \$165,000 to be paid by the state over a 20-year period.

The new Israel Putnam School on Parker Avenue, opened in 1951 with 12 rooms, cost \$484,013, with \$120,000 returnable by the state during 20 years. Four rooms which were built as an addition to this school and opened in September, 1955, were financed by an appropriation by the city of \$100,000. Not yet



accepted by the state, the new rooms are expected to receive about \$36,000 in state aid, payable over a five-year period.

Four rooms added to Jonathan Trumbull School in 1952 were built at a cost to the city of \$192,400, with \$59,414.80 returnable in state aid over the following 20 years.

The John Barry School addition, opened in September of 1953 and containing 12 rooms, was built at a cost of \$632,035, with \$158,335.40 returnable in state aid over a 20-year period.

South Meriden's Hanover School addition, opened in 1954 and consisting of 10 rooms, cost \$498,849.20 plus a sewer assessment levied by the city of \$37,841.55, part of which will be recovered as additional users connect with the sewer line. State aid for Hanover, payable over 20 years, comes to \$154,334.80.

Costs are incomplete as yet for the Nathan Hale School on Baldwin Avenue, consisting of 14 rooms plus two kindergartens and due for use in September, 1956. It is estimated that state aid may run to around \$156,000.

Meriden is currently faced with a need for secondary school expansion as higher enrollments make themselves felt in the upper grades. When the High School opens in September it will be operating at full capacity, and even with continued use of the obsolete Annex, half sessions will be necessary by 1957, if no new building is available. The junior high schools are above capacity currently and face the alternatives in September, 1956 of going on half sessions or housing some classrooms in temporary quarters.

Planned to meet the need are two new high schools, one on Coe Avenue on the west side of Meriden and one on the east side, capable together of handling the projected enrollment of at least 2,400 foreseen for the mid 1960's. The present High School would then be converted for use as a junior high school. Lincoln Junior High stands in need either of rebuilding or of enlargement and drastic modernization and Jefferson is also slated for improvement. The bill for Meriden taxpayers may run as high as six or seven million dollars, with state aid defraying the balance of the cost.

Meriden's school building program since 1949 has been under the direction of the School Building Committee. This group was appointed by Mayor Howard Houston in accordance with a state statute passed in that year. At the request of bonding authorities, it handled financing for the Roger Sherman addition. Enlarged in 1950, it now includes the five members of the Board

of Education, a member from the Court of Common Council, one from the Board of Apportionment and Taxation, the Building Inspector, a representative from the PTA, and three members chosen from the public at large who, by custom, are often engineers. Appointments are made by the mayor.

So well did the committee fulfill its function that it continued to operate during the whole of the elementary school building program. Late in 1953 a question arose over its standing because at the time of the original appointments no term of office had been set for its members. This oversight was remedied when the council voted that the members serve two-year terms from the time of appointment.

Elementary school buildings in use in 1956 are: Jonathan Trumbull, opened in 1925 and added to in 1952; Israel Putnam on Parker Avenue, built in 1951, with a four-room addition completed in 1955, the old Israel Putnam School on South Broad Street, built in 1884 and since enlarged by six rooms; the new Benjamin Franklin School on West Main Street; Hanover in South Meriden, built in 1937 and enlarged and modernized in 1954; Samuel Huntington School on King Street, built in 1887 and reconditioned in the mid 20's; the old John Barry on Columbia Street, built in 1894 and slated for closing as soon as enrollments permit; the John Barry Annex plus the new building which was completed in 1953; Roger Sherman, built in 1929 and enlarged in 1949; and the new Nathan Hale School, scheduled for use in September of 1956. There are two junior high schools: Jefferson on the east side, built in 1926; and Lincoln, originally constructed for use as a grammar school in 1905 and converted to its present use by addition of a wing in 1926. The High School on Pleasant Street was opened in 1913. Meriden's total school plant, including sites, buildings, and equipment, is at present valued at \$7,862,500.

Currently, Meriden teachers receive a starting salary of \$3,400 with the maximum for those with a bachelor's degree set at \$5,400. Further raises are probable as the city struggles to meet the teacher shortage and to retain its position in a state-wide competitive situation.

Report cards in the elementary grades reflected modern theories of education when traditional marking was abandoned in 1951. Seeking to give information on individual effort and achievement as well as on pupils' standing in relation to the class, authorities



adopted a system which graded each subject in relation to the pupil's effort plus an indication of his class standing. This was found to be confusing and in 1955 a return was made to the more orthodox method, with a special section provided to acquaint parents with students' working habits and general levels of accomplishment.

All elementary schools except the old Israel Putnam on South Broad Street and the Samuel Huntington have hot lunch programs, open to children within walking distance of the schools as well as to bus children. The program shares in the Federal Surplus Food arrangement and is self-supporting except for initial capital investments of kitchen equipment.

Stimulated by the growing need for school expansion, branches of the Parent-Teacher Association which had been dormant since the mid-30's were reformed from 1948 on. PTA's are active in all the elementary schools and the two junior high schools while the High School has its equivalent in the Fathers' Club. Their influence has been felt beyond the traditional area of better understanding between parents and teachers. Through the PTA Council, a consultive body made up of representatives of the Meriden branches, information on school building needs and plans has been relayed to members and the public, which has resulted in better understanding of and support for Meriden's school needs.

Since 1950 the health of all Meriden school children has been the province of the Health Department. Previous to that time the public school health program was under the control of the Board of Education while the Health Department provided health services to the parochial schools. This program began in 1923, with the appointment of one full-time nurse and one part-time physician to work with non-public school children.

The present program employs the services of a school health advisor, a supervisor of nurses, eight school nurses and two dental hygienists, all on a full-time basis, and six physicians and two dentists part-time. Dr. John E. Stoddard, who served as medical advisor and physician for athletics at the High School from 1912 to 1954 on a voluntary basis, is currently school health advisor.

Since the reorganization in 1950, a health manual to serve as a comprehensive guide for all health procedures and activities has

been prepared and accepted and the standards for health service in public and parochial schools have been equalized. A daily screening of all pupils is carried out, hearing tests are made, and nurse-teacher conferences are featured. High School students are offered tuberculin tests and chest X-rays. Vaccination against smallpox has been made compulsory for all pupils entering school. Immunization against diphtheria, whooping cough, and tetanus is recommended and offered at school clinics but is given only after written consent by the parent. Fluoride treatment for the teeth of children in the lower grades has been made available, and a Salk vaccine program against polio is partially completed.

School nurses are trained and equipped to help children who suffer illness and accidents at school, but an important segment of their effort is devoted to educational work which will improve pupils' general health level and teach them to avoid disease and accident. To this end they try to work closely with teachers and parents on health education projects and to follow up and interpret health tests on pupils involving such factors as sight, hearing, dental conditions, and the like, with a view to their correction.

September, 1955, found 6,635 registered in Meriden's public schools, an increase of 422 over the previous year. A count of preschool children revealed 800 five-year olds, 985 three-year olds, and 1,053 one-year olds, suggesting that expansion beyond what is presently planned may eventually be necessary. 1,000 students are registered at the High School, 1,419 in the junior highs, and 4,216 in the elementary schools. A total of 357 persons are employed by the school system, of whom 257 are teachers. In addition there are ten principals, three vice-principals, five supervisors, 41 custodians, and 39 serving as clerks, librarians, and cafeteria workers.

Wilcox Technical School, run by the state on buildings constructed and maintained by the city, had an enrollment last year of 325, with 25 teachers. Students devote half their time here to non-shop courses, choosing their shop training from a list which includes mechanical drafting, auto mechanics, machine, electrical, carpentry, silversmithing, printing, sheet metal, tool and die, and ornamental design. Several girls are currently enrolled in the ornamental design course.

According to the Connecticut Public Expenditure Council, Meriden's per pupil cost for the school year ending in 1955 was



\$250.60, a rank of 80th among 169 Connecticut towns. The school budget for 1956 is \$1,912,290.30 plus \$254,387.50 in interest and school bond payments. Meriden currently receives \$58.75 per pupil in state aid.

In February of 1956, evening school enrollment totaled 831, of whom 52 were in classes for the foreign born, 508 were in the general division, and the rest were in co-sponsored activities which included navigation, the Savings and Loan Institute, and the Investment Forum.

In 1955 George Magrath became Superintendent of Schools, replacing Dr. Malcolm Rogers who had served from 1949. Mark Bollman took over the post of principal of the High School vacated by Mr. Magrath, and J. Ormonde Phelan assumed the duties of administering the adult evening school, carried out since 1927 by Mr. Bollman.

The parochial school of St. John's Lutheran Church closed its doors in 1955 after more than 70 years of service. It was founded in 1886 with an enrollment of 27 scholars and in 1905 nearly 200 scholars were meeting for instruction in classrooms in the lower part of the church. The spreading of the parish membership and the problems of transportation and traffic hazards were among the prime factors in the decision to discontinue the school.

St. Laurent's parochial school began with the arrival from Nicolet, P.Q., Canada of five Assumption nuns to teach the children of the parish. Classes were begun in the basement of the church but by 1894 enrollment had risen to 300 and larger quarters had become necessary. A brick structure of six rooms was completed in 1903 and has since been enlarged.

Teaching is still done by the Sisters of the Assumption, who have established an American novitiate at Petersham, Mass. Enrollment at St. Laurent's as of September, 1955, stood at 318 students, with nine teachers. French grammar and church doctrine are stressed in the school's curriculum.

St. Mary's parochial school opened in 1896, six years after the founding of the parish. Its pupils were and continue to be taught by the Notre Dame Sisters of Baltimore, Md., of whom there are at present four at the school. The present building which has five classrooms, houses also the parish hall and the convent and was constructed in 1937.

Currently, 166 students are enrolled in the classes at St. Mary's

which cover the first through the eighth grades. The school stresses a well-rounded basic educational program and possesses a well-stocked library of film strips for the enrichment of regular classroom work.

The story of Meriden's parochial schools begins in 1855, seven years before free public schools were established by the town. In this year classes for Catholic children were started in the basement of the church building at the corner of Broad and Olive Streets which St. Rose's parish had bought from the Episcopal congregation. By 1860 the school was able to move to the new church building at the present location on Center Street, which had been enlarged and provided with basement rooms for this purpose. During these early years, students were instructed by lay teachers under the direction of the pastor.

A new school building was constructed on Liberty Street in 1872, and later moved to the rear of the present building. To staff the school, the church arranged to have a band of four Sisters of Mercy obtain permission from their motherhouse in Ennis, County Clare, Ireland, to come to Meriden. A chapel was built for them in 1887 and an addition to the convent was constructed in the same year.

Today the school consists of 12 classrooms, with the facilities of St. Rose Community Building available for gymnasium and other activities. Classes range from the first through the eighth grades, and are taught by eight Sisters of Mercy from the Mt. St. Joseph motherhouse in Hartford and four secular teachers. September, 1955, showed an enrollment of 433 children. Teaching stresses the three "R's" plus the fourth — Religion. A school orchestra has been formed to participate in the Parochial School Music Festival.

Generous oversubscription by parishioners to a school building fund has made certain the construction of a new eight-room addition to the school plant. The addition will make possible a much larger enrollment and ninth-grade instruction is also planned, along with increased junior high school facilities.

St. Stanislaus' parochial school opened its doors in 1897 with one teacher and an enrollment of 20 scholars. By 1905 the enrollment had climbed to 120 pupils, another room was added, and two teachers gave instruction, one in Polish and one in English. After the new church was built at its present location on Olive



Street, the former church building was used as a parochial school.

The new school, built at the present location, was completed in 1915, of Gothic design to conform to the architecture of the church. Its teachers are Sisters of St. Joseph whose motherhouse is at St. Stevens Point, Wisconsin. St. Stanislaus is Meriden's largest parochial school, with 703 scholars enrolled in classes which run from the first through the eighth grades. Current plans call for further expansion of the school, to meet the increasing enrollment.

When St. Joseph's Church completed its new building on West Main Street, the former chapel on the corner of Butler Street which the congregation had purchased from the Trinity Methodist Church was put to use as a parochial school. By 1905 instruction in the first through the sixth grades was being carried on in five rooms by the Sisters of Mercy from the Convent of St. Bridget, with an enrollment of 260 pupils.

Early in 1915 work began on the present parochial school, located in the block adjoining the church, and the building was dedicated in the same year. At about the same time a parochial residence was built on Goodwill Avenue and a convent was provided for the Sisters of Mercy. Extensive improvements including an enlargement of the playground have been made since. Enrollment at St. Joseph's in September, 1955, was 350 pupils, under the direction of nine teachers. Classes range from kindergarten through eighth grade.

In 1944, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church purchased from the city the Nathan Hale School on Lewis Avenue and arranged for its conversion into a parochial school. The building has been renovated to make it more fire resistant, and classes are taught from kindergarten through the ninth grade.

Twelve classrooms are in use, with the ninth grade, the only one in the city taught in a parochial school, employing three of them for its commercial and classical instruction. Students are taught by ten Religious Teachers Filippini from the motherhouse in Morristown, New Jersey. A lay teacher is in charge of the kindergarten. Italian is taught throughout the school in addition to the regular school subjects. Special attention is given to recent arrivals from Italy who speak little or no English; 14 of these students have been enrolled during this year. All students from fifth grade up are enrolled in Civics clubs which are chartered

with and receive material from the Catholic University of America. Emphasis is on local and national problems of government and community living.

Holy Angels' Church in South Meriden has acquired about eight acres of land on Meadow Street as the eventual site of a new church plant which will include for the first time a parochial school.



### Building Meriden

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION in Meriden since World War II has never been fully able to keep pace with the demand. The city has been spreading out in all directions to an extent almost beyond the conception of the earthbound observer. Only from the air, on a clear day, can the city's growth be seen in one wide panorama, with its network of new streets in the outskirts, and new developments crowning every hill.

In 1955, a total of 1,167 building permits was issued, with a valuation of \$8,652,048, which by no means represents the full value of these properties, which is always listed at only a proportion of actual cost. Included in this figure were the new International Silver Company factory and administration building on South Broad Street, listed at \$4,000,000; the Meriden Boys' Club, listed at \$200,000, and the new church of St. Peter and St. Paul, listed at \$134,000.

Of the total permits last year, 320 were for one-family units, valued at \$2,721,335. In each of the last five years, this rate of growth has been maintained. Most of the homes built were for one-family occupancy. Exceptions were the Chamberlain Heights development, which has been occupied for the last two years, the Yale Acres, another moderate rental development of much the same type, with multiple family apartment buildings, and the Johnson Farms development in South Meriden.

A survey of Meriden building, taken in the fall of 1955, showed an increase of more than a million dollars in building permits over the preceding 12 months. Residential construction alone was half a million dollars ahead for the same period.

The Meriden Planning Commission has had the task of examining plans for new developments to make sure that they meet the requirements of the city, with respect to the layout of streets, the character of the structures proposed, and many other details. Zoning regulations must be adhered to, and variances are only granted for the best of reasons.

When zoning was first instituted here, nothing could be done

about the disorganized growth which had taken place for much longer than Meriden's first century. The regulations were for the future, and they proved invaluable, especially in recent years.

Revision of the local building code, a project in long preparation, has been completed, and should prove of material assistance in keeping building construction orderly and of a character in keeping with the best interests of the city.

Mechanical installations of all types are well covered in the code. Heating, air conditioning, oil burners, plumbing, and electrical work are carefully inspected. Boards of examiners have been established, each board consisting of a master tradesman and two journeymen, each of the two having had at least 10 years experience. A Building Department representative sits as an *ex officio* member. These boards conduct examinations for those seeking licenses as master tradesmen or journeymen, and recommend in writing to the building commissioners what action should be taken on each application.

There is a further regulatory group — a board of appeals, with authority to affirm, modify, or reverse a decision of the building commissioners when acting upon an appeal. A further application may be submitted by an aggrieved person to the Court of Common Pleas for the area within 15 days after the filing of the board's decision.

In this manner, the city is attempting to maintain high standards for the protection of Meriden's future, and to avoid the repetition of mistakes which may have been made in the past.



# The Sesquicentennial

THE FIRST step toward the observance of Meriden's 150th birthday was taken on February 18, 1955 when the Merchants' Bureau of the Meriden Chamber of Commerce submitted a petition to Mayor Altobello and the Court of Common Council asking that a Sesquicentennial committee be named to embrace all interests in the community.

The mayor approved the idea and the council gave its endorsement. Parker B. Allen was named general chairman, and the formation of committees began almost at once. An elaborate framework of organization was drawn up, resembling in many respects the plans for the Centennial celebration of 50 years ago.

The dates selected for the Sesquicentennial were June 17-23 of the current year, and city-wide participation was assured from the start. Invitations were sent far and wide to former residents, and many wrote back almost at once to state that they were coming.

The program adopted designated Sunday, June 17, as Church Day; Monday, June 18, as School Day; Tuesday, June 19, as Industrial Day; Wednesday, June 20, as Governor's Day; Thursday, June 21, as Celebrity Day; Friday, June 22, as Homecoming Day; Saturday, June 23, as Community Day.

Special events in keeping with these designations were arranged.

This book was prepared as one phase of the program, its cost underwritten from the \$28,000 fund approved by the council for the expenses of the 150th anniversary observance. No profit will be realized by any member of the committee which prepared it, and receipts from its sale will be paid into the fund.

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# Sesquicentennial Celebration Week

## June 17-23, 1956

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SUNDAY, JUNE 17th      CHURCH DAY — RELIGION

*Master of Ceremonies* — Parker B. Allen, General Chairman  
*President*, Charles Parker Co.

A.M. Special Services, All Churches

8-8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

2-5 Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

2-5 Open House, Meriden Hospital, Cook Avenue

2-5 Open House, Memorial Hospital, Paddock Avenue

2:30 Band Concert, Hubbard Park

3:30 Official Opening of Meriden Sesquicentennial Celebration —  
General Chairman — Hubbard Park

Invocation

Address — Mayor

Dedication of Music Shell

Benediction

Choral Group Singing

7 Pet Show, Columbus Park

9:15 Fireworks, Columbus Park

MONDAY, JUNE 18th      SCHOOL DAY – EDUCATION

*Master of Ceremonies* – Attorney George E. McGoldrick  
*President*, Meriden Board of Education

Visitation of public and parochial schools all day,  
especially by former students and teachers.  
Special Sesqui exercises

A.M.

8- 8 p.m. Open House, Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9- 9 Special Displays, Curtis Memorial Library

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

6-12 midnight Silver City Side Show & Rides, Columbus Park

1 Open House, Y.M.C.A.

2- 5 Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

3 Tennis Match C. C. I. L., Hubbard Park

4 Golf Tournament (local), Municipal Golf Course

6:30 Exhibition Softball Game, Washington Park

7 Preview Meriden Industrial Exhibit, State Armory

7- 9 Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

7:15 Sesqui Social, City Hall Auditorium

7:30 Coronation of Miss Sesquicentennial, Insilco Field

8 Block Dance, John Barry School Yard

8:30 Historical Pageant, Insilco Field



TUESDAY, JUNE 19th      INDUSTRIAL DAY

*Master of Ceremonies* — Norman J. Stringer  
*President*, The Manufacturer's Association of Meriden  
and Wallingford, Inc.

A.M.

8- 8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9- 9 p.m. Special Displays, Curtis Memorial Library

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

12-12 midnight Silver City Side Show & Rides, Columbus Park

1      Open House, Y.M.C.A.

2- 5   Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

2-10   Industrial Exhibit, State Armory

3      Tennis Match C. C. I. L., Hubbard Park

3:30   Elementary School Track Meet, 1, 2, and 3 grades,  
Washington Park

3:30   Junior High School Track Meet, Ceppa Field

4      Golf Tournament (local), Municipal Golf Course

8      Choral Festival, Music Shell, Hubbard Park

9      Sesqui Dance, City Hall Auditorium

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20th      GOVERNOR'S DAY

*Master of Ceremonies* — Judge Denis T. O'Brien, Jr.

A.M.

8- 8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9- 9 p.m. Special Displays, Curtis Memorial Library

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

12-12 midnight Silver City Side Show & Rides, Columbus Park

1      Open House, Y.M.C.A.

2- 5   Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

2-10   Industrial Exhibit, State Armory

3      Tennis Matches C. C. I. L. (finals), Hubbard Park

3      High School Track Meet, Ceppa Field

3      Elementary School Track Meet, 4, 5, and 6 grades  
Washington Park

4      Golf Tournament (local), Municipal Golf Course

6      Invitation Softball Teams, Washington Park

6      Exhibition Water Ballet Teams, Hubbard Park Swimming  
Pool

7- 9   Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

8:30   Historical Pageant, Insilco Field

9      Brothers of the Bush Rock and Roll Dance, City Hall  
Auditorium



THURSDAY, JUNE 21st      CELEBRITY DAY

*Master of Ceremonies —*

Former Mayor, Attorney Francis R. Danaher

A.M.

8- 8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9- 9 Special Displays, Curtis Memorial Library

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

12-12 midnight Silver City Side Show & Rides, Columbus Park

1      Open House, Y.M.C.A.

2- 5 Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

2-10 Industrial Exhibit, State Armory

3:30 Doll Carriage Parade, Washington Park

3:30 Marble Contest, Washington Park

3:30 Bicycle Races, Washington Park

4      Golf Tournament (local), Municipal Golf Course

6      Invitation Softball Tournament, Washington Park

7- 9 Arts & Crafts Association Exhibition, Horace Wilcox  
Technical School

8:30 Historical Pageant, Insilco Field

8      Block Dancing, John Barry School Yard

FRIDAY, JUNE 22<sup>nd</sup>      HOMECOMING DAY

*Master of Ceremonies* — Former Mayor William J. Cahill, Jr.

A.M.

All Day, Family Reunions and Visitations to Points of Interest  
about the City

8- 8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9- 9 p.m. Special Displays, Curtis Memorial Library

10-5 p.m. Static Displays, Local Airport

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

12-12 midnight Silver City Side Show & Rides, Columbus Park

1      Open House, Y.M.C.A.

4      Golf Tournament (local), Municipal Golf Course

6      Softball Tournament (Semi-finals), Washington Park

8      Meriden Symphony Orchestra, Music Shell, Hubbard Park

8      Block Dance, John Barry School Yard



SATURDAY, JUNE 23rd      COMMUNITY DAY

*Master of Ceremonies* — Arthur F. Eggleston  
*President, The Lane Construction Corporation*

A.M.

8- 8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9-12 Special Displays, Curtis Memorial Library

9 Local Golf Tournament (Semi-finals), Municipal Golf  
Course

P.M.

12-8 p.m. Open House, Meriden Historical Society, Andrews  
Homestead

12-12 midnight Silver City Side Show & Rides, Columbus Park

1 Open House, Y.M.C.A.

2 Sesqui Parade

9 Senior Sesqui Ball, State Armory

9 Junior Sesqui Ball, Crystal Ballroom

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SUNDAY, JUNE 24th      CARRY-OVER ACTIVITIES

8- 8 p.m. Open House Ground Observer Corps., G. O. C. Post,  
Buckwheat Hill

9 Golf Tournament Finals (local), Municipal Golf Course

9- 5 p.m. Model Airplane Meet, Columbus Park

10 Softball Tournament Finals, Washington Park











Op.



